William Goyen

A BRIDGE OF BREATH*

You've been buried in Charity for a number of years, Follie our Follie, and I had almost forgotten you until a memory of you suddenly shuddered cold round my heart—sooner or later we all have to walk barefoot over the cinders of our flame-eaten illusions —and called me back to the loft where your relics lie stored; and I am here among them rummaging for some answer. It is hard to be in the world and bone of your bone. Cry me out a name, which, like a spangle cast out to me, I may carry out of this loft with me.

I come, bending low, into the loft in the haybarn. I had been here once before with Aunty to rummage for a picture of her mother, and when we found the picture it had one eye eaten out by some animal and looked hideous and staring and tormented.

Then I went again and again, with a heavy feeling of sin. I was looking for something *within myself* that might flower out in this warm secret light, unfurl (I had in my mind the vermillion image of a paper Hallowe'en serpent that would unroll, splendid and quivering, when blown into) like a paper flower dropped in a bowl of water. I felt the excitement—the first I can remember—of discovery, like the feeling I had when I crept into forbidden books. ("Eugenics" was big and black and evil, hidden under the linens in the closet, and there I first saw the picture of a woman with a window in her belly through which I could see a little, wound baby, all in a sac entwined by a mass of strings and cords.) I trembled in the loft.

Here in the loft, which is really your sepulchre, Folner, are many things of silence and dignity; and it seems that in them lie all the hope, all the future, in the riot of insects and rodents which are feeding on this storage of antiques.

There is a spinning wheel which spiders have mocked with glit-

* This is an excerpt from a novel in progress.

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tering webs like doilies and lace valentines. There is an organ with a rat world in its insides, and rats' feet sift over the strings with the faintest prism tinkle like the death-knell of the delicate. On a sugar-cane pole in a corner are strung old dresses and coats, and crumpled in a corner is a Ku Klux Klan hood like a caved-in ghost. The clothes hanging in the purple loft-light are shredded by claws and streaked by rain and drenched in light and burned through by ceaseless rays of sunlight and moonlight and starlight. They are ripped by teeth and gnawing (almost as if in some kind of vengeance) and the tiny punctures of the mouths of ants and moths, as if the wearing of life had left some sweet syrup on them. A gray diaphanous veil hangs like web and spun so fine by age that it seems a veil of light. Because these garments have been so long diffused with light and lights—through many washings and drenchings—their colors have faded and the lights have dyed them delicate pale Light colors.

In an eave is a whole mosque of dirtdobber domes and globed hives of bees and the blown gray papier-maché bags of wasps. Curtains of gossamer hang trembling purple and luminous. In this wreckage the insects and creatures have made their artifice and their order: frail mouth-built or cilia-built structures, envelopes and membranes and spun-out or spat-out fragile architecture, phantom and fantastic and terrifying.

The faded pine walls wear Wear like a fabric, a garment of speared and cometted and darted and spiralled grain, and grain designs like those on the sole of a foot; and lacunae of lucent amber resin; and serrated or glabrous surfaces: a landscape of figures of grotesque naked men and women among pools and hummocks and flumes; and there are fantastic scrawlings and lewd phalliforms of grain. On one wall there is a terrible water-mark figure like the huge claw of an enormous bird grappling over a long dried pool of blood.

There is an old cowboy hat felted with fuzz and fine gathered agglutinated dust.

A pale watery green sea of Mason jars, and a pile of rubbish onions that had sprouted sickly lianas curling over each other and then withered to crumble are in a dark corner and near them is a croakersack of peanuts, slashed open by some hunger and spilled out like doubloons and now only shrivelled husks. And there is a crock, cold to feel and marbelled like an aged agate.

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There stands a churn that has not turned for years.

And behold a group of dolls, limp and dignified, like ancestors sitting together; and some blueing bottles filled with gentian light; and a small tarnished silver key. Away in the farthest end of the loft a big rusted tusk of a plow curves out of the shadow.

The loot of the loft lies like treasure in some thief's lair, and the thief is everywhere so powerfully present I can feel him gathering and fumbling and destroying. Yet all is so silent, except for a tinkling and occasional shiftings like a page turned in a book.

And then I find the two chests that belonged to you. On the outside is printed Gayety Shows and Company. Inside I find out your whole secret.

Inside is a corroded violin whose bow has molded strings furred with ravelling, like a rat of hair; some peeling gilded tapshoes whose taps are thin from much dancing. And false faces, with tragic-gay bent down eyes, women's wigs, tubes of make-up grease, and spangles spilled over the clothes like dried fishscales. And there are fringed gypsy shawls, and scarves, crimson and jacinth and one green as a ragged peacock. I touch a scarf and it falls into air and light and seems to evanesce. And there is a yellow glove and here is a Mandarin's lavish emerald-mauve gown with sleeves hanging like pointed ass's ears, with intricate work of golden braid laid tarnished over the hem.

And here is a crushed paper bird on a stick.

Sifted all among the treasures of the chests are letters and photographs of many beautiful played-out people, like lost cards, dealt and used for win or loss and cast away.

At the end of the loft room is an old dresser with a swung mirror. I go there. On the dresser is a pincushion made like a tomato, a mending box full of buttons, a cameo box of beads and cameos and bracelets and balls of faded yarn. Spiders and dust have claimed them all. Next to the dresser is an old ruptured and gutted chair.

"I give you this glass," Folner's voice whispers, "in which to see a vision of yourself, for this is why you've come. My breath is on the glass and you must wipe away my breath to see your own image." In the mirror I cannot see myself but only an image of dust. I brush it off—and then see my portrait there. For a moment I look like Folner! Age and time have blown their rheumy breath on the mirror

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and curdled it and it clouds again. Then I blow my own breath upon the mirror and wipe it clear for another instant. I seem old, I seem unused, as these loft things, in the capture of some thief. The mirror seems to say "Dance! Swagger with a cane and sequins! Atone for all our well and cellar and window agony!" I cry out "Folner!" in the loft. But only the rustle of startled creatures and the faint swinging of webs respond.

I think he ate some kind of Glaukos bitterweed and suffered a change for the eating and sprang away into a marvellous haunted and haunting world and never could return—although they waited in Charity for him—nor wanted to. Until he was washed, dead like uprooted coral weed by some violence only the sea knows and only the sea-depths suffer, upon the oil-rimed and sawdusted shingle of Charity, and was claimed and buried there. They were all looking for him, waiting and watching, and looking for some grass that might take them to him—Granny Ganchion, Berryben, Malley Ganchion, Aunty, Sue Emma—and even I. And I, having not waited but wandered for him (calling "Draw me; I will follow thee!" but he murmured "Whither I go thou mayest not follow me."), have come back here where I think (because of a vision of memory I have had) I might find the magic he found and ate among the bitterweeds that liberated him and so myself be liberated into understanding and cruel authenticity. For it seems clear to me now that we cannot bear to be ourselves. It is too dangerous, it is too great a risk, we might not survive.

"Love in the cotton gin, my dear. And once, very early in the delicate watergreen shell of morning, in an old moored shellbarge on Green's Bayou down around the Battlegrounds. We got tar on us.

"The CCC Camp at Groveton didn't help. Ah the East Texas woods in the fall, with flying red leaves like desires and the smell of burning brush and that dangerous voluptuous wind of a norther that stabbed the heart, so evil; like Spanish Fly on the soul. . . . Do I shock you? Of course I say these things, which are absolutely true, to shock you, you are so good, Boy, you and Berryben are so damned sweet and good, such damned sweet kids." And you dazzled your opal cufflinks at your white wrists.

"Something cursed me. There was that melancholy always over me, brooding over me. Why? As far back as I can remember, lying

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on the pallet in the summer of the afternoons, there was the drone of the electric fan like the drone of bees and mama going through the rooms in her slip. I felt frail and limp. It was just sorrow bred in me, bred in you too, you'll see; we are the sons of grief at cricket. I had to stop it.

"I was wild for the world of a flashing eye and life castanetting round and stomping an insinuating foot. Sometimes in Charity I couldn't stand it any longer and would go out in the henhouse and make up dreams and play like I was something grand and royal and march up and down with a poker for a cane, with only the chickens to watch me. And then love myself and feel *real* again, a kind of tremor from the world ran through me.

"Behold my talents: started out in the Church with good Hattie Clegg, led Young People's programs, gave the main speech, sang a solo, then a duet with some girl, then said the final Benediction—it was all my show. Went to Conferences at Lon Morris College, even signed up to be a missionary. I was just looking for some passionate cause in the world to give myself to (so are all of you, all of you)—can I help it if the Church petered out for me? Then I turned to music and the stage. At the high school I was in every play that was put on and I even wrote an original musical show for the Senior Night; and at Grace Methodist Church I was always directing plays, sang in the choir, sang solos, did impersonations on programs in Fellowship Hall, played the piano by ear, anything that was make-believe. To make me forget that cistern wheel turning and turning and that old shuttered house and the family Sundays on the front porch.

"O the drone of the flies and the bees droning in the zinnias like a sound blown by a child on a comb and a piece of tissue-paper; and the melancholy working of the wind in the trees and a whole dead town gleaming out before us in a false serenity under the burning sun of a fleecy gathered summer Sunday sky with a piece of a moon in it, and nothing happening.

"When the circus came to Bailey's Pasture I knew this was my chance. Remember how you and I and Aunt Malley went and what we saw and did, the yellow-skinned grinning freaks in their stalls with the sawdust floor, twisted like worms the freaks grinned and ground in the sawdust; and the screams of the animals in the menag-

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erie and the sad exciting music of the calliope? I bought you a paper bird on a stick and here it is, crushed in this loft, to try to tell you something, to try to tell you, even then, that you were lost in Charity and that you had to get away, like me. Remember when I lifted you up on that big elephant, you little scared thing perched on that enormous back, you shook and cried and got so excited you almost fainted and Aunt Malley had to run to buy some lemonade and throw it in your face. We were going through the world in Bailey's Pasture that night, my own world, and I wanted to tell you then that I would never see you again and that the world was like this circus, stall by stall and dazzling Ferris Wheel, and lights and tights, whirling and gleaming and screaming and twisting on a sawdust floor. Then I took you and Malley home and slipped away again, back to the circus; and met a trapeze man with thighs in black tights; and stayed and went away with the circus early that next morning. As we rolled away in our gay wagons, the last thing I saw of the house where you lay sleeping was the wheel turning over it, and the only one in that whole house that I cried for was you, Boy O Boy.

"In San Antonio I left the circus and took secret tap dancing at Hallie Beth Stevens' Studio of the Dance, sang out in front of a chorus of tapping girls, had a cane and a hat, and strutted singing 'You've Got Me in the Palm of Your Hand' . . . . not before chickens in a Charity henhouse but a real clapping audience.

"The rest I needn't tell you. Bailey's Pasture was my revelation.

"They treated me as though I was a freak in Charity, and I know it was just jealousy and envy. They blamed it on my mother your Granny Ganchion because she dressed me like a girl when I was little and called me 'Follie.' But it was more than that. Right away I learned what I was and went on like that, what I was, and *used* myself for that, made no bones about it . . . and can't say the same for most of the rest of Charity who don't know *who* they are. What matters if it got me death?

"But if you're going to start calling names, I can tell you a few things about Brother Ramsey in the church who knew me all my life and even preached my funeral sermon, and who taught me a lot of what I know. Everything in this world is not black and white, as little Charity thinks—there are shades in between; and I can tell some dirt on Jim Lucas and Mimi Day Calkins—sitting there in the Pastime

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Club with her finger in his fly—and Floydell Lucas, his wife, bent over a cradle at home singing a lullaby—and a lot of other things. (We are all broken over the cradle, Boy.) Nobody's hands are clean in Charity. But let Charity flick its old toad's tongue after the gay green and golden summer flies—and let them croak away that same old croaking tune. They don't want anybody to be anything that they can't understand and give a name to. They had to have some ready label to lick and stick on you; and when they couldn't figure me out because I wanted different things from what they in Charity wanted —they started bullying me and torturing me. They were all really afraid of me—and most of them envied me, really envied me.

"The whine and shriek of the planeing mill was always in my head, as though they were dressing ship-lap in my brain. And that hard little mouth of hunger pressing hot against my soul. To be fed! Who could feed it in Charity? Oh Charity, I would thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm I will spew thee out!

"I take along some memories. The sight of the black watertower squatting like a fat-bellied reptile over Charity eggs; and the old house smelling of O-Cedar Oil; that old yard of guineas and cackling hens and the manure of cows. But Boy we had a time of it didn't we? You little frightened thing, always frightened. On one Easter Sunday I taught you a secret. We rolled away some stone, remember?"

"And you don't know how hard I prayed in the barn in the sunsets I thought were the burning end of the world, Follie. You made me feel so full of sin that I never mentioned your name to anybody; and when once and a while they would say your name I would tremble and think they knew. When the Riverbottom Nigras came into town to tell that they had seen the Devil walking in the sloughs of the riverbottom I knew it was you come back and I had nightmares at night and never left the kitchen all day, sitting trembling by the woodstove. I thought I heard you at the windows, scratching; and once I am sure I saw you sitting in the Beantree with the three black hens that lived up there. You were my first discovery of Sin and when the preacher spoke about Sin it always had your face. I have just found your real face, Follie my Follie."

"Oh Boy I had to have some drama in a life. I had rhapsody in me. But it all just got too big and too beautiful for me. It devoured

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me. I was so afraid of the beauty I found out that I began to run and run from it until I melted down into this death. Can you learn anything from this?

"Somewhere beyond all this muck and dreck there lies a pasture of serenity and I will find it. I am on my way. Hang a wreath on the door of this fallen house for me. How did I die? I invited Death. Because I was so very weary. The rest is a secret never to be told (see seven crows). Leave us alone and we will destroy ourselves in the end, but we will leave undestroyed our otherselves to breathe the bridges of breath between our ruined and isolate islands.

"I am the Ur-Follie of many derivations of your time. Watch."

I watch and watch and watch, Follie, and I will build a bridge between these ruined islands; then blow the bridge of breath away. But the islands will remain forever like stone islands in a still and frozen sea. For we are only breath to blow and bridge eternal ruins while we breathe, until we are blown away.

At your funeral there was a feeling of doom in the Grace Methodist Church, and I sat among my kin feeling dry and throttled in the throat and thought we are all doomed, who are these, who am I, what are we laying away, what splendid glittering sinful part of us are we burying like a treasure in the earth?

The sermon was a long and sad one. It told about all the family, about your young life in Charity and your work in the Church (once you had stood, at ten, before the whole congregation and recited the books of the Bible first forwards then backwards).

I want to make a little speech upon the passing of this boy, the sermon said. We have lost a leaf from a beautiful old Charity tree (a leaf! a leaf!). A bright star has fallen over Charity (a star!). We have lost a jewel (a sequin! a rhinestone! a parure of great price!), a toy of the world (O Jack-in-the-Box!). This is a piece of the lavish gay world brought back to Charity black earth, the daisy pollen of the daisies of the world clings to his limbs brought home to this hive. We are burying the brightness of the world. We are burying like a foul thing in the dirt this twisted freak, like Sue Emma's two little monsters, little slobbering freaks with bloated watermelon heads, Sue Emma's sins (and every day they'd come and measure and measure . . . their heads were like Granny Ganchion's vile goitre, round and swollen and strutted with purple veins big as a chicken's intestines).

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O precious shard of the Old Mother Lode that we bury! Old Mother Lode, ore of what dark cursed vein?

Songs went through my head, Folner, as I sat there, songs I had known where, when? "O had I the wings of Noah's dove, I'd fly away to the one I love. . . ." "One day you goin' come and call my name. . . ." "My love went away on a long, long train. . . ." And the little verse, piping itself out in my brain, over and over . . . "It was just a little doll, dears, brought in from the fields and the rain; its hair not the least bit curled, dears; and its arm trodden off by the cows. And its face is all melted away. . . . " And the tale of the gingerbread man who ran and ran and melted away as he ran. . . . And the mournful little tune that a child could blow on a Petunia; and the words of the hymn "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go" . . .

"When I was young," the voices howled round in Granny Ganchion your mother's head as she sat there gazing at you in your cheap pink coffin, "I loved gems and jewels and would almost steal to have a colored ring to glisten on my finger, just like a Gypsy. We are burying here the glassy part of me. O me . . . desire faileth: it is the burden of the grasshoppers. There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins; And sinner plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. . . . Sure we had nothing in Charity but Beulah Land to hope for and wait for . . . but how could they help! They were not enough while we waited. The church cheated us, Brother Ramsey cheated us. I had to burrow down *under* it all like a quick mole to have any life. Don't think I don't know all this. Now there Follie, lay still, lay still. Remember when I couldn't keep you quiet on a pallet in the summer afternoons when you would have to take your nap? This is the last pallet, little Follie, a pallet for good. Lay still on it child. (There's old Miz Van come to your funeral—she brought you the first present you ever got in this world—a pitcher of cold buttermilk the mornin you were born. Fly in the buttermilk Lula Lula. . . .)

"What does he say, brother Ramsey, in his talking, in his sermon? He is condemning Follie to hellfire. The Lord hath hung this millstone upon my neck, and I know what for and I have never told. It is a lavalier of wickedness. It is the enormous rotten core of Adam's Apple. But I have had my life in my time . . . some way. . . . "

(You knew lips, how they move to make their words; and the

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grimaces of faces when you were yelled at were sometimes so grotesque that you dreamt of them, strained and veined and goggle-eyed —and in your dreams the faces were only making faces at you and not saying anything.

You came to hear only the voices in your head. All the world beyond you was hushed as though some turning of a great wheel was stopped beyond you (but went on inside you), and there remained only the silence of working mouths on shifting faces . . . . and there was only the babel of voices in your head.

When desire failed you, you had nothing left but the betrayal of desire (the moth-eaten coronation robes of dethroned queens) and a pair of ruby beads given you once by a dark alien youth who found you at a carnival and loved you and stayed to love you longer and again. You would steal away at night and run to him at the City Hotel and all the town knew. It was said that Christy was this stranger's son but no one ever proved it, for Christy was black-headed and swarthy among the other towheads—but this could have been the Indian blood that was supposed to be in the Ganchion veins come out in him, you said.

Your father was a southern sea-captain with a wart on the left side of his nose for lechery and by the time you were fourteen he had shot dead two Negroes for not keeping their place and calling him Cap'n.

You had had a hand upon your thigh in the church choir that made you trill like a meadowlark "Fling Wide the Gates!"; and once while singing "Hear The Soft Whisper" at communion when all the heads were bent you received your first baptism of joy—and had been Joy's sister ever since.)

And then, when the family started walking by your coffin to look at your doll-in-the-rain face for the last time, Granny Ganchion flung herself into your coffin and tried to seize you to her, crying out in her carline voice, but you would not come up to her; and they pulled her away.

As we drove along (what Charity was not in the procession was standing watching us like a parade) a storm broke over us and scattered leaves. It was the first full devastation of autumn.

We stood around the grave and they let you down in it while Brother Ramsey sprinkled rose petals. It seemed he was murmuring

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"sawdust to sawdust" and that surely what was falling was sawdust from the planeing mill. All around the graveyard there was the ruin of summer, summer's wreck and plunder. Weeds were rusty with seed and the zinnias were crumbling. And then all the members of the families fell upon each other, embracing and kissing and wailing and sharing their separate and secret tragedies; and for a moment at the Charity Graveyard there was a reunion of blood and a membership of kin over your grave (the odor of lilies and carnations gave me a sensuous, exotic elation that I was ashamed of). There was a kind of meekness and the relief felt in truce. Some took a flower from your grave and fought others to keep it, it was like a battle of fiends over a holy prize; and Aunty Malley came up in a trance and said to Cousin Lottie *"What kin are we all to each other, anyway?"* But the deaf old Mother, wise and bitter and skeptic, did not fall to the graveyard trickery and stood off to herself, gazing at your grave.

There seemed to be some misery over in the world. Some atonement, some ransom was paid for all of us, for all our Sins. Now, in due time and in right Season, what resurrection of what spirit would assure us of the meaning of this death, Folner?

As we turned to go away and leave you in the graveyard, I looked back and discovered a tall and sorrowful stranger standing alone by a crepemyrtle tree. It seemed he wanted to say something to me, that he was beckoning to me. But we got in our cars and drove away and he turned and watched us as we went away.

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James Baldwin

EVERYBODY'S PROTEST NOVEL

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* that cornerstone of American social protest fiction, St. Clare, the kindly master, remarks to his coldly disapproving Yankee cousin, Miss Ophelia, that, so far as he is able to tell, the blacks have been turned over to the devil for the benefit of the whites in this world—however, he adds thoughtfully, it may turn out in the next. Miss Ophelia's reaction is, at least, vehemently right-minded: "This is perfectly horrible!" she exclaims. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

Miss Ophelia, as we may suppose, was speaking for the author; her exclamation is the moral, neatly framed, and incontestable like those improving mottoes sometimes found hanging on the walls of furnished rooms. And, like these mottoes, before which one invariably flinches, recognizing an insupportable, almost an indecent glibness, she and St. Clare are terribly in earnest. Neither of them questions the medieval morality from which their dialogue springs: black, white, the devil, the next world—posing its alternatives between heaven and the flames — were realities for them as, of course, they were for their creator. They spurned and were terrified of the darkness, striving mightily for the light; and considered from this aspect, Miss Ophelia's exclamation, like Mrs. Stowe's novel, achieves a bright, almost a lurid significance, like the light from a fire which consumes a witch. This is the more striking as one considers the novels of Negro oppression written in our own, more enlightened day, all of which say only: "This is perfectly horrible! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" (Let us ignore, for the moment, those novels of oppression written by Negroes, which add only a raging, near-paranoiac postscript to this statement and actually reinforce, as I hope to make clear later, the principles which activate the oppression they decry.)

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a very bad novel, having, in its self-

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righteous, virtuous sentimentality, much in common with *Little Women*. Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—like its multitudinous, hard-boiled descendants—is a catalogue of violence. This is explained by the nature of Mrs. Stowe's subject matter, her laudable determination to flinch from nothing in presenting the complete picture; an explanation which falters only if we pause to ask whether or not her picture is indeed complete; and what constriction or failure of perception forced her to do so depend on the description of brutality—unmotivated, senseless—and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds.

But this, let us say, was beyond Mrs. Stowe's powers; she was not so much a novelist as an impassioned pamphleteer; her book was not intended to do anything more than prove that slavery was wrong; was, in fact, perfectly horrible. This makes material for a pamphlet but it is hardly enough for a novel; and the only question left to ask is why we are bound still within the same constriction. How is it that we are so loath to make a further journey than that made by Mrs. Stowe, to discover and reveal something a little closer to the truth?

But that battered word, truth, having made its appearance here, confronts one immediately with a series of riddles and has, moreover, since so many gospels are preached, the unfortunate tendency to make one belligerent. Let us say, then, that truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment which cannot be charted. This is the prime concern, the frame of reference; it is not to be confused with a devotion to Humanity which is too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are notoriously bloodthirsty. We have, as it seems to me, in this most mechanical and interlocking of civilizations, attempted to lop this creature down to the status of a time-saving invention. He is not, after all, merely a member of a Society or a Group or a deplorable conundrum to be explained by Science. He is—and how old-fashioned the words sound!

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—something more than that, something resolutely indefinable, unpredictable. In overlooking, denying, evading his complexity—which is nothing more than the disquieting complexity of ourselves—we are diminished and we perish; only within this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger, darkness, can we find at once ourselves and the power that will free us from ourselves. It is this power of revelation which is the business of the novelist, this journey toward a more vast reality which must take precedence over all other claims. What is today parroted as his Responsibility—which seems to mean that he must make formal declaration that he is involved in, and affected by, the lives of other people and to say something improving about this somewhat self-evident fact—is, when he believes it, his corruption and our loss; moreover, it is rooted in, inter-locked with and intensifies this same mechanization. Both *Gentleman's Agreement* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* exemplify this terror of the human being, the determination to cut him down to size. And in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* we may find foreshadowing of both: the formula created by the necessity to find a lie more palatable than the truth has been handed down and memorized and persists yet with a terrible power.

It is interesting to consider one more aspect of Mrs. Stowe's novel, the method she used to solve the problem of writing about a black man at all. Apart from her lively procession of field-hands, house-niggers, Chloe, Topsy, etc.—who are the stock, lovable figures presenting no problem—she has only three other Negroes in the book. These are the important ones and two of them may be dismissed immediately, since we have only the author's word that they are Negro and they are, in all other respects, as white as she can make them. The two are George and Eliza, a married couple with a wholly adorable child—whose quaintness, incidentally, and whose charm, rather puts one in mind of a darky boot-black doing a buck and wing to the clatter of condescending coins. Eliza is a beautiful, pious hybrid, light enough to pass—the heroine of *Quality* might, indeed, be her reincarnation—differing from the genteel mistress who has overseered her education only in the respect that she is a servant. George is darker, but makes up for it by being a mechanical genius, and is, moreover, sufficiently un-Negroid to pass through town, a fugitive from his master, disguised as a Spanish gentleman, attracting no at-

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tention whatever beyond admiration. They are a race apart from Topsy. It transpires by the end of the novel, through one of those energetic, last-minute convolutions of the plot, that Eliza has some connection with French gentility. The figure from whom the novel takes its name, Uncle Tom, who is a figure of controversy yet, is jet-black, wooly-haired, illiterate; and he is phenomenally forbearing. He has to be; he is black; only through this forbearance can he survive or triumph. (Cf. Faulkner's preface to *The Sound and the Fury*: These others were not Compsons. They were black:— They endured.) His triumph is metaphysical, unearthly; since he is black, born without the light, it is only through humility, the incessant mortification of the flesh, that he can enter into communion with God or man. The virtuous rage of Mrs. Stowe is motivated by nothing so temporal as a concern for the relationship of men to one another—or, even, as she would have claimed, by a concern for their relationship to God—but merely by a panic of being hurled into the flames, of being caught in traffic with the devil. She embraced this merciless doctrine with all her heart, bargaining shamelessly before the throne of grace: God and salvation becoming her personal property, purchased with the coin of her virtue. Here, black equates with evil and white with grace; if, being mindful of the necessity of good works, she could not cast out the blacks—a wretched, huddled mass, apparently, claiming, like an obsession, her inner eye—she could not embrace them either without purifying them of sin. She must cover their intimidating nakedness, robe them in white, the garments of salvation; only thus could she herself be delivered from ever-present sin, only thus could she bury, as St. Paul demanded, "the carnal man, the man of the flesh." Tom, therefore, her only black man, has been robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex. It is the price for that darkness with which he has been branded.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, then, is activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation; and the spirit that breathes in this book, hot, self-righteous, fearful, is not different from that spirit of medieval times which sought to exorcize evil by burning witches; and is not different from that terror which activates a lynch mob. One need not, indeed, search for examples so historic or so gaudy; this is a warfare waged daily in the heart, a warfare so vast, so relentless and so powerful that the interracial handshake or the

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interracial marriage can be as crucifying as the public hanging or the secret rape. This panic motivates our cruelty, this fear of the dark makes it impossible that our lives shall be other than superficial; this, interlocked with and feeding our glittering, mechanical, inescapable civilization which has put to death our freedom.

This, notwithstanding that the avowed aim of the American protest novel is to bring greater freedom to the oppressed. They are forgiven, on the strength of these good intentions, whatever violence they do to language, whatever excessive demands they make of credibility. It is, indeed, considered the sign of a frivolity so intense as to approach decadence to suggest that these books are both badly written and wildly improbable. One is told to put first things first, the good of society coming before niceties of style or characterization. Even if this were incontestable—for what exactly is the "good" of society?—it argues an insuperable confusion, since literature and sociology are not one and the same; it is impossible to discuss them as if they were. Our passion for categorization, life neatly fitted into pegs, has led to an unforseen, paradoxical distress; confusion, a break-down of meaning. Those categories which were meant to define and control the world for us have boomeranged us into chaos; in which limbo we whirl, clutching the straws of our definitions. The "protest" novel, so far from being disturbing, is an accepted and comforting aspect of the American scene, ramifying that framework we believe to be so necessary. Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating; remote, for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely ensconced in the social arena, where, indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone, so that finally we receive a very definite thrill of virtue from the fact that we are reading such a book at all. This report from the pit reassures us of its reality and its darkness and of our own salvation; and "As long as such books are being published," an American liberal once said to me, "everything will be all right."

But unless one's ideal of society is a race of neatly analyzed, hard-working ciphers, one can hardly claim for the protest novel the lofty purpose it claims for itself or share the present optimism concerning them. They emerge for what they are: a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty, panic, trapped and immobilized in the sunlit prison of the American dream. They are fantasies, connecting nowhere with reality, sentimental; in exactly the same sense that such movies as

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The Best Years of Our Lives or the works of Mr. James M. Cain are fantasies. Beneath the dazzling pyrotechnics of these current operas one may still discern, as the controlling force, the intense theological preoccupations of Mrs. Stowe, the sick vacuities of *The Rover Boys*. Finally, the aim of the protest novel becomes something very closely resembling the zeal of those alabaster missionaries to Africa to cover the nakedness of the natives, to hurry them into the pallid arms of Jesus and thence into slavery. The aim has now become to reduce all Americans to the compulsive, bloodless dimensions of a guy named Joe.

It is the peculiar triumph of society—and its loss—that it is able to convince those people to whom it has given inferior status of the reality of this decree; it has the force and the weapons to translate its dictum into fact, so that the allegedly inferior are actually made so, insofar as the societal realities are concerned. This is a more hidden phenomenon now than it was in the days of serfdom, but it is no less implacable. Now, as then, we find ourselves bound, first without, then within, by the nature of our categorization. And escape is not effected through a bitter railing against this trap; it is as though this very striving were the only motion needed to spring the trap upon us. We take our shape, it is true, within and against that cage of reality bequeathed us at our birth; and yet it is precisely through our dependence on this reality that we are most endlessly betrayed. Society is held together by our need; we bind it together with legend, myth, coercion, fearing that without it we will be hurled into that void, within which, like the earth before the Word was spoken, the foundations of society are hidden. From this void—ourselves—it is the function of society to protect us; but it is only this void, our unknown selves, demanding, forever, a new act of creation, which can save us—"from the evil that is in the world." With the same motion, at the same time, it is this toward which we endlessly struggle and from which, endlessly, we struggle to escape.

It must be remembered that the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society; they accept the same criteria, they share the same beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality. Within this cage it is romantic, more, meaningless, to speak of a "new" society as the desire of the oppressed, for that shivering dependence on the props of reality which he shares with the

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Herrenvolk makes a truly "new" society impossible to conceive. What is meant by a new society is one in which inequalities will disappear, in which vengeance will be exacted; either there will be no oppressed at all or the oppressed and the oppressor will change places. But, finally, as it seems to me, what the rejected desire is, is an elevation of status, acceptance within the present community. Thus, the African, exile, pagan, hurried off the auction block and into the fields, fell on his knees before that God in Whom he must now believe; who had made him, but not in His image. This tableau, this impossibility, is the heritage of the Negro in America: *Wash me,* cried the slave to his Maker, *and I shall be whiter, whiter than snow!* For black is the color of evil; only the robes of the saved are white. It is this cry, implacable on the air and in the skull, that he must live with. Beneath the widely published catalogue of brutality—bringing to mind, somehow, an image, a memory of church-bells burdening the air—is this reality which in the same nightmare notion, he both flees and rushes to embrace. In America, now, this country devoted to the death of the paradox—which may, therefore, be put to death by one—his lot is as ambiguous as a tableau by Kafka. To flee or not, to move or not, it is all the same, his doom is written on his forehead, it is carried in his heart. In *Native Son,* Bigger Thomas stands on a Chicago street corner watching air-planes flown by white men racing against the sun and "Goddamn" he says, the bitterness bubbling up like blood, remembering a million indignities, the terrible, rat-infested house, the humiliation of home-relief, the intense, aimless, ugly bickering, hating it; hatred smoulders through these pages like sulphur fire. All of Bigger's life is controlled, defined by his hatred and his fear. And later, his fear drives him to murder and his hatred to rape; he dies, having come, through this violence, we are told, for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood. Below the surface of this novel there lies, as it seems to me, a continuation, a complement of that monstrous legend it was written to destroy. Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses. And, indeed, within this web of lust and fury, black and white can only thrust and

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counter-thrust, long for each other's slow, exquisite death; death by torture, acid, knives and burning; the thrust, the counter-thrust, the longing making the heavier that cloud which blinds and suffocates them both, so that they go down into the pit together. Thus has the cage betrayed us all, this moment, our life, turned to nothing through our terrible attempts to insure it. For Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth. But our humanity is our burden, our life, we need not battle for it; we need only do what is infinitely more difficult, that is, accept it. The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended.

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Reuel Denney

THE OCEAN URN

"Facing west from California's shores,"
Partial J. Merriwell, out walking, before the after-glow,
Through the pale mist made sloping way
Past white houses. O, sea-kissed San Francisco.
Then, at once, residential quite ran out,
Giving to park and fir. Low, foggy green
Threw smell of cedar and its poignant oil.
Beyond an empty lot, a cliffside scene,
Only a matter of yards, lay all the sea.
Our western routes end there. There in the dark
Merriwell to Merriwell had his say.

The lack of a myth can be strong as a myth
When murder without a meaning is what is meant:
The force in this sea compels us to admit
That wherever we loved before, the proton went.
Gods dead in a smoke head may leave us a clearer wit
As their flash dies from our wine.
So smoke while the cliff shakes. Nietzsche
Was probably more of a neighbor than yours or mine.
And the leaders are loved when they lead, the sun
Is followed by the sunners for its glow.
Our betters went, not merely because they were weak,
To talk to the dark and the light where we all flow.

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PRESENCE OF MAN

Sometimes he seemed like that one: the man of power
Who with the reins of a charioteer would ride
Racers of Constantinople on wide, resonant courses
And leap in an electric equipoise
From the unsteady back to back of galloping horses.

Sometimes he seemed like that one: the hunter
Who was mantled in a mist that morning breathes.
A posse shape of stooped, halated shadow,
Over a mountain marsh where ducks fly low,
Brought down the tinted duck to the frigid ripple.

Sometimes he seemed like that one: the father,
The carer at the grey hour when day itself is pale
Over the sheep without shape that drift the world,
Clouds beyond the tenement. How quiet on his crook
He wishes that the rider and the hunter were not whirled.

Lysander Kemp

GREAT GREEN

The dark woman in the Ecuadorian gloom
has beauty not to our liking, too difficult,
neither voluptuous nor like a flower,
but monumental: the wide primitive hips,
the massive steadfast accepting body not marble
nor ivory but rock-brown, color of earth.
She lacks, her staunch and obscure torso lacks
Parisian charms and Phidian perfections—
but say Rivera smoothens her power, or say
Gauguin flattened her statuary strength
to planes of color; or she is monolithic,
a Mayan stela grand in the deeps of green.

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Imagination's violence only can lug her
out of her beauty's jungle and only home,
but the Frank evinces the Bantu: see her lugged
to a northern dinner (be violent, this is fiction).
Look at the barefoot stupidity; mute as a stone
she gapes in fright at so much feline grace,
at so many painful cat-eyes cold with pity
that look and not for a moment look away.
Alas, the barbaric and beautiful statue now
is a beastly dirty savage in dirty cotton.
But now see Mrs. Pritchard lugged to the gloom
(be violent, this is fiction). Look, she flies
in her high heels and sheer hose in the tangle
of snakes and shadows, ready to scream and scream.
Her blond familiar beauty is ruined. She dreads
the head-hunting tree. She too is afraid of cats,
and coldly behind her burn their burning eyes,
they are sneaking, sneaking, *tigre* and *tigrillo*.
She whimpers, peering and pausing—look, she listens
for padding feet, she hears the shock-proof jeweled
works of her heart clank-clank like a dollar watch
in the green hell or green mansion of the jungle.

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Francis Fergusson

THE THEATRICALITY OF SHAW AND PIRANDELLO

On Shavian Theatricality: The Platform and the Drawing-Room.

The curious convention-of-no-convention of modern realism is often described as that of the fourth wall: we pretend, as audience, that we are not present at all, but behind the invisible fourth wall of the parlor which the stage accurately reproduces. This is a pretense which it is difficult to maintain; and side by side with modern realism many dramatic forms have flourished which frankly accepted the stage as such, and the audience as extremely present. Opera, ballet, and many kinds of comedy do so, in modern times, on the plea that they are not quite serious—"only" music, or distraction, or jokes.

Comedy in any period assumes the presence of the audience, and so cannot as such pretend to the strict modern realism of Ibsen and Chekhov. It is certainly true that Chekhov reveals comic aspects of his action, and expects the laughter of the audience; but his convention does not admit that relationship between stage and house, and the *pretense* of unarranged and untheatrical actuality is never broken. Comic genres, on the other hand, accept some sort of limited perspective, shared with the audience, as the basis of the fun; they show human life *as* comic just because they show it as consistent according to some narrowly-defined, and hence unreal, basis. They fit Mr. Eliot's definition of a convention: They are agreed-upon distortions, forms or rhythms frankly *imposed* upon the world of action. When we understand a comic convention we see the play with godlike omniscience; we know what moves the puppets; but we do not take them as real—when Scaramouche gets a beating, we do not feel the blows, but the idea of a beating, at that moment, strikes us as funny. If the beating

* This is a chapter from Mr. Fergusson's forthcoming book, "The Idea of a Theater," to be published by the Princeton University Press in November.

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is too realistic, if it breaks the light rhythms of *thought,* the fun is gone, and the comedy destroyed. Hence comedy has provided one of the chief clues to the development of unrealistic forms in the modern theater. And hence the purpose, in this enquiry, of considering the Shavian comic inspiration.

I say "the Shavian inspiration," because Shaw's peculiar comic sense, brilliant, theatrical, and unmistakeable as it is, never found a consistent comic convention, comparable to Moliere's, for instance, in which it could be completely realized. He obviously assumes the audience, he plays to the gallery, from the very beginning; yet in the beginning of his career he did not distinguish his aims from the realism of Ibsen. Later he seemed to identify his purposes with Brieux's (in the preface he wrote to Brieux's *Three Plays*); but he never propounds a simple thesis as Brieux, with perfect logic and consistency, always does. In this same preface he pays his respects to the machine-made boulevard entertainment in such scornful terms as would lead one to suppose that he would never use it himself; yet his plays written before the first World War are usually (among other things) sentimental parlor comedies of that kind, "stirred to the tune of perpetual motion" and topped with "the bread sauce of the happy ending," as Henry James describes them. At the same time they have the quality called Shavian, which means something as definite as "Quixotic." As Shaw survives from epoch to epoch, however, his thinking and his reading as active as ever, he becomes more and more self-conscious; and though the theater for which he started writing is nearly gone, he is brilliantly revealed sparring upon the bare platform, and so the nature of his comic inspiration comes clear. In this development one may learn something about the peculiar difficulties of modern comedy, and something about the ways in which modern realism is superseded by other and subsequent forms.

Mr. Eric Bentley, in his very useful study, *George Bernard Shaw,* has pointed out that Shaw's comedy in its beginnings is based upon the same enlightened drawing room as Oscar Wilde's. *Major Barbara* is an example of this early period in his development. Lady Brit's drawing room feels as stable and secure as the traditional cosmos of the Greeks or Elizabethans, but it is as clear and small as a photograph; the London version of the bourgeois world. And the story of the play may be read as a typical sentimental parlor comedy for the

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carriage-trade. Lady Brit is an absurd but likeable pillar of society; her estranged husband, Undershaft, a fabulously wealthy munitions-maker of great wisdom and kindliness: her daughter Barbara a sincere but misguided Major in the Salvation Army. She is in love with Cousins, a professor of Greek, a character suggested by Professor Gilbert Murray. The main issues are between Barbara and her father: the relative merits of the Salvation Army and munitions-making as ways to be saved. Cousins disapproves both of the Salvation Army and the Undershaft industry of destruction, but at the end he marries Barbara and places his Greek-trained intellect together with her revivalistic fervor in the service of bigger and better bombs. Shaw apparently wants us to believe in Barbara as a real human being in the round, instead of a caricature, and to take her dramatic conversion to her father's business seriously. At any rate he rejoices and bids us sentimentally rejoice at the end of his fable when the girl, the man and the money are at last brought together. The audience may go home (in spite of the witty dialectics it has heard) in laughter, tears and complacency, spiced, at most, with a touch of the shocking—for the secure basis of their little world, the eternity of the drawing room, is never seriously questioned. Where, in all this, is the Shavian quality?

The play may be read as a thesis, a proof that munitions-making is the way to be saved; and this is in fact one of the bases of the many witty debates. It is a wonderfully farcical idea, but Shaw is far from offering it as Brieux offers his theses. As he uses it, it has depths of irony which Brieux never dreamed of: Shaw neither believes nor disbelieves it; its relation to reality is never digested—nor its relation to the sentimental story that Shaw puts with it. Its usefulness lies in its theatrical fertility: it is a paradox which may be endlessly debated, but it is in no sense the truth as Brieux thought he was proving the truth. The characters are conceived on a similar basis of paradox—except Barbara, who, as I have said, is supposed to be real. But Lady Brit, Undershaft, and each of the minor characters clearly has his paradoxical platform. Lady Brit's is that she must have both the Undershaft money and the creed of the Church of England. The two are logically incompatible; but granted this non-Euclidean postulate, everything she does follows with unanswerable logic. And so for Undershaft, who presents himself as wise, kind, and completely

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dedicated to destruction. These platforms no doubt represent clarifications or schematizations of real attitudes in contemporary society. In the play, the rationalized platforms, as they are debated and developed, constitute the brisk mental life which we enjoy; but the relation of this life of the mind, this farce of rationalizing, to the human reality, is no more defined than that of the paradoxical thesis to truth. Thus the play is a parlor game, based upon the freedom of the mind to name and then to rationalize anything, without ever deviating from the concept to the thing—the British Empire and Original Sin as light and portable as the blueprints of the social planners and human engineers. Shaw the moralist invites us into this brisk exchange for therapeutic reasons, as gymnasium instructors instigate boxing or softball: not to win, not to prove anything, but for the sake of a certain decent fitness in the moral void. But Shaw the clown sees his and our agility as a rather frightening farce.

If one thinks over these elements—the sentimental story, the farcical-profound paradoxical thesis, and the complacency of the audience—one may get spiritual indigestion. But if one sees a performance, one may understand how it all hangs together for those quick two hours: it is because its basis in the upholstered world of the carriage trade is never violated. On this basis it is acceptable as a string of jokes which touch nothing. And Shavian comedy of this period still flatters and delights our prosperous suburbs. But Shaw himself, as the world changed and the London drawing room appeared to be less than eternal, became dissatisfied with it. He first began planning *Heartbreak House* about thirty-five years ago.

In *Heartbreak House* the perpetual-motion of the dialogue is built on the same basis as in *Major Barbara*: each character has a paradoxical platform to defend, with epithet and logic, in the brisk free-for-all of the emancipated parlor. Hector, for instance, is unanswerable as a vain, erotic housecat and heroic man of action; Captain Shotover as omniscient, morally fit as a fiddle, and a futile old man secretly sustained by rum. The Shavian farcical inspiration is here to be found at its sharpest and deepest. But in this play Shaw comes very close to presenting it with the integrity and objectivity of art: to accepting the limited perspective afforded by his view of action as rationalizing, and to finding the proper dramatic form for its temporal development—neither the boulevard intrigue nor the

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thesis à la Brieux which he had tried to use in *Major Barbara,* but a "fantasia" as he calls it. This notion of dramatic form was derived from Chekhov, as he explains in the preface; and one way to understand the superior consistency and self-consciousness of this play is by comparing it with Chekhov's masterpiece. It was a performance of *The Cherry Orchard* which Shaw saw before the first World War that gave him his clue—precisely because Chekhov saw the prewar drawing room, "cultured, leisured Europe before the war," as Shaw puts it, not as eternal, but as dissolving before our eyes, and the significant mode of human action, not as rationalizing, but as the direct suffering of the perception of change. It was Chekhov's opposite perspective on the bourgeois theater of human life which made Shaw aware of the nature and limitations of his own.

Thus the ostensible scene is still the emancipated parlor; but in *Heartbreak House* this parlor is no longer felt as all reality: we feel around it and behind it the outer darkness, the unmapped forces of the changing modern world. The life of the play is still in the making of epithets and in logical fencing; but now we see that the emancipated mind, though omnipotent in its own realm, is helpless between the power of the wealth-and war-making business-industrial-financial machine one way, and the trivial or deathly passions of the faithless psyche the other way. And the parlor in which it is free to play its endless game is itself brought into focus as a thin insulating sheath.

Because of this added dimension—because Shaw now places his scene in a wider perspective—he understands the real shape, the temporal development of his action, far more accurately. In this play, as in *The Cherry Orchard,* nothing happens, and nothing is proved or disproved. The people come and go, their love affairs come and go with the pointless facility of the monkey-house; offstage we are aware of their endless intrigues for money or power. But the interest is centered where it belongs: not on event or narrative sequences, not on what happens to any individual, but on the fateless fate and the bodiless farce of the emancipated mind itself. This, I think is what Shaw means by subtitling the play "A fantasia in the Russian manner on English theses." Chekhov sees his people "as" suffering; Shaw, with his moral fitness, sees them "as" fully awake and sharply rationalizing. That the abstract form of these complementary versions of human action should be so similar is perhaps significant. In any case,

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the comparison between the two plays offers a good example of what I have called the partial perspectives of the modern theater.

But in spite of its greater artistry and self-consciousness, *Heartbreak House* has its blemishes. Ellie, like Major Barbara, is not quite objectified; the author has, and demands of us, a sympathy for her which violates the convention of farce. And at the end of the play, when the bombs fall and it is time to send the audience home, Shaw cannot resist a little preaching: he seems to wish to say that his farcical vision need not be accepted at all if we will only mend our ways; that we are all right, really. The therapist and drawing room entertainer is even here not quite replaced by the inspired clown, with his disinterested vision of action as rationalizing in the void. Thus we are brought to the crux of our problem: why is it that the Shavian inspiration, so strong and lively, never quite finds a consistent convention and a completely-accepted form?

Shaw never discovered a publicly-acceptable, agreed-on basis in reality outside his peculiar comic perspective, whereby it might have been consistently and objectively defined. All comedy is conventional, and hence unreal; but Shaw does not make the distinction between the real and his own ironic perspective upon it. This is as much as to say that his perspective, or comic inspiration, is that of romantic irony: the basis of this theses, of his rationalized characters, and of the movement of his dialogue, is the *unresolved* paradox. The paradoxes of the discursive reason cannot be resolved without an appeal to something outside the discursive reason. If the Emancipated Mind is to be really emancipated, its freedom must be that of the squirrel cage, and its life (having neither beginning, middle, nor end) as formless as the squirrel's perpetual race.

In *The Magic Mountain* Hans Castorp and Settembrini are discussing irony. The only variety which Settembrini admits is what he calls "direct, classic irony," in which the ambiguity is a rhetorical device only, and the meaning of the ironist is unmistakeable. I should prefer to call it neoclassic, to distinguish it from Sophoclean irony, and because it is certainly the irony of Molière. For example, consider the platform of Molière's imaginary invalid, Argan: it is as absurd as Lady Brit's. Argan is making a career of invalidism, and (like a Shavian character) he is prepared to accept all the logical consequences of his position. But in the light of the sturdy common sense

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of Molière's *honnêtes gens,* to whom the story of Argan is presented, the absurdity and the impossibility are clear from the first. Thus the temporal form of the play is given: it will be a demonstration by *reductio ad absurdum* of Argan's untenable assumptions—i.e., by an appeal from logic to reality, from Argan's rationalization to what Moliere can assume that his audience directly *sees.* When the demonstration is complete, the play is over; but the comic convention and the dramatic form are objectified with reference to the *common* sense of the audience. It is this common or agreed-on basis which Shaw, like Hans Castorp, will not or cannot have—whether because he cannot rely on a common ground with his audience, or because it would limit the freedom of the mind which he demands.

In the beginning of his career (in *Major Barbara,* for instance) the unmanageable depths of the Shavian irony were obscured by the clichés of the parlor comedy which he was ostensibly writing, and by the supposed security of the Edwardian parlor. And Shaw himself hid coyly and more or less successfully behind the pretense of the standard cast of characters. In *Heartbreak House* the parlor has lost its solidity, the rationalized "characters" are more frankly accepted as unreal, and the true Shavian sense of human life as rationalizing in the void almost finds its true form, the "fantasia" or the arbitrarily-broken *aria da capo.* Moreover, in *Heartbreak House* we may observe the cognate process: the emergence upon the stage of the ironist himself. It is true that Shaw can be felt in all his plays behind the paper-thin mask of his characters; and it is true that there are representatives of the Shavian *persona* before Captain Shotover. But the Captain, probably Shaw's profoundest farcical figure, is also the most complete representative of Shaw himself. The drawing room evaporates; the characters evaporate, and the prophet-clown himself appears upon a stage which is now accepted as a real platform before the modern crowd. The basis in reality of romantic irony is in the attitudes of the ironist; and just as everything in *The Magic Mountain* points to the shifting thoughts and feelings of Castorp-Mann, so Shavian comedy is not so much a consistent theatrical form as an extension of the author's own entertaining conceptual play.

Too True to be Good is not one of Shaw's best plays; indeed he almost abandons the pretense that he is writing a play at all. But at the end, Audrey—the burglar-preacher who obviously represents

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the author—bursts forth in an impassioned monologue which presents an apocalyptic vision of the nature and destiny of the Shavian theater. As the other characters drift off the stage, bored with Audrey's preaching, he describes them as follows: "There is something fantastic about them, something unreal and perverse, something profoundly unsatisfactory. They are too absurd to be believed in; yet they are not fictions; the newspapers are full of them." He might be describing all of Shaw's characters: unbelievable as people, yet not defined as fictions either; unsatisfactory, now, even to their author. But the ironist's inspiration is unquenched; alone on the lighted platform before the darkened house, Audrey continues: "And meanwhile my gift has possession of me; I must preach and preach no matter how late the hour and how short the day, no matter whether I have nothing to say." It is the voice of Shaw, the genius of farce, at last aware of his real basis. But Shaw the moral therapist (though relegated to the final stage-direction) has still the last word. "But fine words butter no parsnips," he warns us; "the author, though a professional talk-maker, does not believe that the world can be saved by talk alone."

II. Action as Theatrical: *Six Characters in Search of an Author.*

There is a kinship between what I have called the Shavian theatricality especially as it emerges in the later plays, and the much deeper, more consistent and more objective theatrical forms of Pirandello. Shaw as theater artist seems to have been feeling for something which Pirandello achieved: the restoration of the ancient magic of "two boards and a passion," frankly placed in the glare of the stage lights and the eye of the audience. In both theaters, the human is caught rationalizing there in the bright void. But Pirandello, having the seriousness of the artist, presents this farcical-terrible vision with finality, and in an integral theatrical form; while in Shaw's complex case the artist is always being thwarted by the drawing room entertainer, or dismissed as romantic by the Fabian optimist or the morally fit man of good will. It is therefore Pirandello that one must study, in order to see how the contemporary idea of a theater (as held by its most accomplished masters) emerged from nineteenth-century

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Realism and Romanticism, including and transcending those genres, as well as Shaw's solitary farce-of-rationalizing.

Six Characters is a convenient example of Pirandello's art: his most famous work, and his first unqualified success.

When the play begins, the curtain is up, the set is stacked against the stage-wall, and a troupe of actors with their director is rehearsing a new play by Pirandello. The rehearsal is interrupted by the arrival of a family in deep mourning: Father, Mother, grown Daughter and Son, and two younger children. These are the "characters"—fictions of the imagination of an author who has refused to write their story—and they have come to get their story or their drama somehow realized. They ask the actors to perform it instead of the play by Pirandello which they had started to rehearse. From this point, the play develops on several levels of make-believe. There is the struggle of the "characters" against the actors and their director, who find the story confusing, or boring, or not good box-office. There is the more savage struggle between the various characters, who cannot agree about the shape, the meaning, or even the facts of their story, for each has rationalized, or mythicized it, in his own way. A few sordid facts emerge: the Father had sent the Mother away to live with another man, whom, he thought, she would love better, and the two younger children are hers by this other man. Hovering near the family, watching its life at a little distance, the Father had met his own Daughter at a house of assignation, Madame Pace's dress shop. Complicated jealousies had developed among the four children of the double brood, culminating in the suicide of the little boy. The crucial episodes are re-enacted by the tormented and disputing characters, in order to show the actors what the story is. When the suicide of the little boy comes up again, by a sort of hellish eternal recurrence, all breaks up in confusion—the fictive characters more real, in their conscious suffering, than the flesh-and-blood acting company.

The story of the six characters, as we gradually make it out, is melodramatic and sensational. The disputes which break out from time to time about "idea and reality," "life and art," and the like, are based on paradoxes in the Shavian manner: romantically-unresolved ambiguities. The whole work may seem, at first sight, to be shop-worn in its ideas, and, in its dramaturgy, hardly more than a

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complex piece of theatrical trickery. When it first appeared, in 1921, some critics were disposed to dismiss it in this way. But the fine productions which it received all over the world gradually revealed its true power and interest, which is not in the literal story of the characters, nor in the bright, paradoxical play of ideas, but in the original sense of action underlying the whole play. Pirandello has explained all this with great clarity in the preface he wrote in 1930 for the ninth edition. This preface is almost as important as the play: it deserves to rank with Cocteau's *Call to Order* and Eliot's *Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,* as one of the works which endeavor to lay the basis for a contemporary theory of drama.

The action of the play is "to take the stage"—with all that this suggestive phrase implies. The real actors and the director want to take it for the realistic purposes—vain, or (with the box-office in mind) venal—of their rehearsal. Each of the characters wants to take it for the rationalized myth which is, or would be, his very being. Pirandello sees human life itself *as* theatrical: as aiming at, and only to be realized in the tragic epiphany. He inverts the convention of modern realism; instead of pretending that the stage is not the stage at all, but the familiar parlor, he pretends that the familiar parlor is not real as a photograph, but a stage, containing many "realities." This is, of course, a narrow and violently idealist view of human life and action; but if held with Pirandello's strict consistency, it cuts deep—very much as the narrow idea of the Baroque theatre, to which it is so closely akin, cuts deep, enabling a Racine to search and reveal the heart. Certainly it is a version of action which enables Pirandello to bring the stage *itself* alive at levels of awareness far beyond those of modern realism.

By the time Pirandello wrote the preface to his play, he had had time to read criticisms of it from all over the world, and to discover how its audiences had interpreted it. These audiences were trained in the modes of understanding of modern realism, and they almost automatically assumed that the point of the play was in the literal story of the characters, and that Pirandello's new idea therefore, was simply a new way to present the sordid tale. If so, then the play would be only another melodrama on the edge of psychopathology. It is this interpretation which Pirandello is at pains to reject first of all. "Now it must be understood that for me it is not enough to represent the

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figure of a man or a woman, however special or strongly marked, for the mere pleasure of representing it," he writes; "to tell a story (gay or sad) for the mere pleasure of telling it; to describe a landscape for the mere pleasure of describing it." When the story of the characters first occurred to him, it was in this realistic form; and as such it did not seem to him to be, as yet, the material of art, which must be "more philosophical than history." He was, in fact, through with modern realism: the literal scene, the actual individuals, and the sensational events of individual lives, no longer seemed to have any form or meaning. But when he sensed the analogy between his problem as an artist, and the problems of his tormented characters who were also seeking form and meaning, he had the clue to his new theatrical form, and to the peculiar sense of human action (as itself theatrical) which this form was to realize. His inspiration was to stop the film of his characters' lives; to play over and over again some crucial episode in this sequence; to dispute its form and meaning on the public stage. By this means he found a mode of action which he, and the actors, and the characters, and the audience could all share by analogy, and which could thus be the clue to formal relationships and a temporal order. And he lifted the action, as it were, from the realm of fact and sensation, of eavesdropping and the curious intrigue, to the more disinterested realm of contemplation. "Always on opening the book we shall find the living Francesca confessing her sweet sin to Dante," Pirandello explains; "and if we return a hundred thousand times in succession to reread that passage, a hundred thousand times in succession Francesca will utter her words, never repeating them mechanically, but speaking them every time for the first time with such a living and unforeseen passion that Dante, each time, will swoon when he hears them. Everything that lives, by the very fact that it lives, has form, and by that same fact must die; except the work of art, which precisely lives forever, in so far as it is form." Francesca's life, as developing potentiality, is stopped at the moment when her peculiar destiny is realized. And it is the crucial moments in the tangled lives of his characters—the moment in Pace's dress-shop, the pistol-shot in the garden—which must be played over with the vitality of improvisation, "as though for the first time," yet because they are played *over*, lifted to the realm of contemplation—it is these moments which the characters must interrogate in the light of the

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stage, as we all must mull over (though in secret) the moments when our nature and destiny are defined.

I have explained that Chekhov in his way also to some degree transcended the limits of modern realism: by selecting only those moments of his characters' lives, to show onstage, when they are most detached from the literal facts and the stultifying rationalizations of the daily struggle. But in Chekhov these moments are suffered in abstraction from thought and purpose, and so his image of human action may seem *too* pathetic. He lacks both Ibsen's powerful moral-intellectual will, and Shaw's fitness-in-the-void. But Pirandello, by means of his fiction of unwritten characters, can show the human creature both as suffering and as wilfully endeavoring to impose his rationalization. This fiction of fictive characters enables him to play *over* his catastrophes; and it was this resource which the realistic stage denied to Ibsen. When his Mrs. Alving, in *Ghosts,* suddenly sees Oswald's infatuation with Regina as a *return* of her husband's infatution with Regina's mother, she gets the passionate but disinterested intuition which is the material of art, and is rewarded with the poetic vision that "we are *all* ghosts." But her final catastrophe—Oswald's collapse—strikes her for the first time only, and so remains, when the curtain falls, undigested, sensational. Pirandello's inspiration is to stop the action with Mrs. Alving's scream, and to play it over, in the actual light of the stage, the imagined lamp-and dawn-light of Mrs. Alving's parlor, and the metaphysical light of her, and our need for *some* form and meaning.

Pirandello is at pains to explain, in his preface, that his play transcends not only modern realism, but also the various romantic genres with which some critics had confused it. The characters may be romantic, he says, but the play is not. The Daughter, for instance, when she takes the stage with her song, her deep feeling, and her abandoned charm, would like to seduce us into her own world of passion, as "the old magician Wagner" does in *Tristan.* But the scene is the stage itself, not her inner world; and her action meets perforce the actions of other characters who claim the stage. Pirandello might also have said, with equal correctness, that his play transcends the Shavian irony, and at the same time realizes the farce of rationalizing with a depth and a consistency beyond that of Shaw. The Father, for instance, has a taste for the paradoxical platform, the unresolved

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ambiguity, and the logical consistency on the irrational premise, which reminds one strongly of Shaw. But he is present as a "real Character" first, and a rationalized platform second; hence we can believe in his sufferings as well as in his conceptualizing—and see both in a scene wider than either. The basis in reality of the Shavian farce appears, at last, to be in Shaw's own "gift" of abstract fitness and verbal agility; but Pirandello, in the stage itself and in our need not only to rationalize but to mythicize, has found a wider basis, on which many versions of human action may be shown together to the eye of contemplation.

There would be much to say of the extraordinary theatrical fertility of Pirandello's plot. The basic situation—the characters claiming the stage for their incommensurable tragic epiphanies, the actors claiming it for the marketable entertainment they are trying to make—has both comic and tragic aspects, and Pirandello exploits both, shifting from one to the other with perfect mastery. The situation, fictive though it admittedly is, has the firmness and clarity, once we have accepted it, of Racinian tragedy or Molièresque comedy. And just because it is so firm and unmistakeable there is great freedom within it: it may be explored and developed with the apparent spontaneity of circus-clowning, the alertness and endless surprises of the Commedia Dell'Arte, where the actors improvised a performance on the broad clear basis of the plots of Latin comedy. The scenes may break into confusion—into philosophical arias and disputes; into laughter; into violence—but we are never lost. The stage, and the need to *take* the stage, frame the action as a mirror might, which no amount of grimacing can destroy—or like the *ampulla* in which the sybil hangs, wishing to die, in the epigraph to *The Waste Land*. It is the static quality of this basic situation which is both its triumph and its limitation.

I have remarked that the play is always breaking down in disputes about the Idea and the Reality, or, more generally, Art and Life. It is in these issueless disputes that the Pirandellesque brilliance most closely resembles the Shavian brilliance; and indeed the unresolvable paradox on which they are based its like the basis of the "free" Shavian irony. But Pirandello, unlike Shaw, transcends his paradoxes by accepting them as final—or rather, (since he does not, like Shaw, see human action as rationalizing only, and the world as

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merely conceptualized) he accepts his paradoxes as various versions of a final split in human nature and destiny itself. In the same way Racine, accepting the split between Reason and Passion as final, thereby transcends it: i.e., transforms it into an object of contemplation. Pirandello's version of this tragic contradiction (after the endless explorations of modern realism and romanticism) is more general than Racine's, and his concept of Art is (after modern Idealism) deeper and wider than Racine's *Raison*, which corresponds to it. Pirandello's utter darkness of unformed Life (or *élan vital*, or *Wille*, or libido) is perhaps even more savage and less human than Racine's Passion. Pirandello is not limited, like Racine, to the rigid scene of the enlightened moral will; he can present characters of various degrees of heroism and enlightenment; and, as I have remarked, he can accept and exploit the comic as well as the tragic aspects of his basic contradiction. Nevertheless, his tragedy is a limited, an invented, an *artificial* tragedy, on the same principle as Racine's; and in the same way it offers to the eye of the mind the eternity of the perfect, and perfectly-tragic artifact—the human damned in his realization—instead of the transcendence of the Tragic Rhythm, which eschews the final clarity and leaves the human both real and mysterious.

One may also understand the limitations of Pirandello's theater by thinking again of its relation to modern realism. I have said that he "inverts" the scene of modern realism, and thus vastly increases the suggestiveness and the possible scope of the stage itself. But of course he does not, by this device, provide the chaotic modern world with a "theater" of action in the ancient sense. One might justly say that his attitude is more "realistic"—more disillusioned and disbelieving—than simple-minded positivism itself, for he does not have to believe in the photograph of the parlor, and he can accept the actual stage for the two boards it is. But he is left, like Ibsen and Chekhov, with neither an artistic convention like the Baroque, nor a stable scene of human life like the Greek or Elizabethan cosmos; and, like Ibsen and Chekhov, he has only the *plot* as a means of defining his action. The inspiration of *Six Characters* is thus not only the view of action as theatrical, but the plot-device whereby this vision may be realized: the brilliant notion of making his protagonists unwritten "characters" and setting them to invade a stage. This plot is so right, so perfect, that it almost exhausts, and certainly obscures, the deeper insights

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into life and the theater which it realizes. Hence the natural though unjustified tendency to think of the play as a brilliant plot idea, a piece of theatrical trickery only, and so miss its deep and serious content. The complete dependence of the play upon its plot-idea constitutes a limitation; but it points to the fundamental problem of the modern theater, which no individual can solve alone.

Pirandello was quite right to think of his characters as being like Dante's Francesca. They too are caught and confined in the timeless moment of realizing their individual nature and destiny, and so imprisoned, damned, as she is. This vision has great authority. It develops naturally out of several diverse versions of the modern theater which I have mentioned, those of Ibsen, Wagner, and Shaw. At the same time it is deeply rooted in the Italian temperament and natural theatricality; and it revives crucial elements in the great theater of the Baroque. It is close to the author's place and to his times, which we share; yet one must remember that it takes as all-inclusive, as the whole story of human nature and destiny, a mode of action and understanding which Dante thought of as maimed, and which he presented in the realm of those who have lost, not the intellect, but the *good* of the intellect: *il ben dell'intelletto.*

The most fertile property of Pirandello's dramaturgy is his use of the stage itself. By so boldly accepting it for what it is, he freed it from the demand which modern realism had made of it, that it be a literal copy of scenes offstage, and also from the exorbitant Wagnerian demand, that it be an absolutely obedient instrument of hypnosis in the power of the artist. Thus he brought to light once more the wonderful property which the stage *does* have: of defining the primitive and subtle medium of the dramatic art. "After Pirandello"—to take him symbolically rather than chronologically—the way was open for Yeats and Lorca, Cocteau and Eliot. The search could start once more for a modern poetry of the theater, and even perhaps for an Idea of the Theater comparable to that of the Greeks yet tenable in the modern world. I shall explain how qualified the success of these authors has been; yet they have tried in various ways to tap the ancient sources, in myth, ritual, folk traditions, and theatrical forms outside the narrow scheme of modern rationalism. And they have all used the stage which Pirandello freed for the uses of the poetic imagination.

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H. J. Kaplan

A MINOR SCANDAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Trouble, trouble, trouble. I lie on my back in bed, holding the telegram up to catch the light. My father, dead in Texas, is being returned to New Jersey for burial. He is dead in the crisis of my thirtieth year and our dialogue—precisely when I was preparing to say the decisive things—has now come to an end. My mother needs me at home, bereft and lonely darling. But I can't go home. I am in the process of working out something which looms immense in my mind, and my most dreadful anxiety is that I shall lose it. I shall certainly lose it if, having left Beirut only yesterday, I find myself in New Jersey tomorrow, whirled in the felt exigencies and confusions of this funeral. Above all, I am not ready to bury my father: he is involved in my scandal and his strength must live one moment longer to sustain me in it. What in the world shall I do?

I push aside the breakfast tray and look about for my robe. My bags have not yet been unpacked, a circumstance which suddenly and absurdly infuriates me. Finally, I go downstairs in my pajamas and call the air-terminal. Yes, there is an empty seat in the plane leaving tonight, but I must pick up my ticket before two o'clock this afternoon. I hang up and book a call to New Jersey. Then I go to my briefcase and litter the room with speeches, documents, resolutions, until I find the notes I made yesterday, as we were flying northward over the Mediterranean. I read them with distaste and growing absorption, and my father—at last!—is alive again, putting forth like Dante's aged Ulysses on the open sea, a powerful, gnarled man, haranguing that small company which followed him still, to devote the "brief remaining vigil of their senses" to one more perilous journey.

So. While he went westward, through "that narrow pass, where Hercules assigned his landmarks," I had gone back, first to his point of departure, the continent of Europe, and then even further east, to the land of his ancestors. He could never understand, he once told me, why his son should return to his vomit. . . . My wife puts her head

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through the doorway and asks me, in a small voice, what I propose to do. Our son peeps around her skirts, meanwhile, piping one of his rare words: pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa. I tell her I do not know, and they both disappear. For a moment I wonder, idly, if the boy can say his name.

Obsessive name! I push aside my notes and go to the windows of the studio, which look out over the roof-tops of the northern fringe of Montparnasse. Beyond Montparnasse is the Luxembourg, the Latin Quarter and, further north, Saint-Germain de Près. Just before I went to the Lebanon I had finished a book, a kind of spiritual guidebook to Paris for Americans. I had wanted it released immediately, so that my father might understand why I tarried here so long. But the publisher had excellent reasons for delay, and now it is too late. Now Paris, my subject and my distraction, has disappeared, as it does whenever I try to get to the bottom of my presence here. Or elsewhere in the world. And my father, in any case, is beyond struggling with the stubbornly unfamiliar language which he—how strange!—bequeathed me.

I turn away from the windows and stand again, shivering and undecided, over my desk. Six weeks of mail and my notes; and a decision to make. Only yesterday I stood shivering on the outskirts of Damascus, watching the sun rise over those heartrending sand dunes, waiting for the Dutch crew of the Skymaster to ready their plane for the flight. It seemed to me then, already, that I had an enormously important choice to make, and I saw myself solemnly announcing this event to—of all people—my father, with whom I had had no correspondence for months. What was it? The difficulty was to decide, then to formulate the emotion that welled up so oddly; to get it all clear in my mind. But the night drive over the Mountain from the coast had left me sore-boned and groggy, aching for sleep.

That I should think of the old man at that very moment, when he was dying in the Texas he had so rashly set out to explore, was not due to some mysterious psychic intervention; nor even primarily to Iskandar Riachy, my great Lebanese friend whose deep-lined, bristling, bright-eyed face bore an astonishing resemblance to my father's. No, it was the Lebanon itself, in the desperate intricacy of the Middle East, which constantly spoke to me of this distant stranger, reminding me that he was a Jew (my author and creator!), fleshing those ancient problems which he and I had always, however obscurely, shared.

And so, standing on the edge of the Damascene oasis, not far from where Saul stumbled and became Paul, I allowed myself to dream of faces and things in Beirut. And here, of course, the mind was crouching

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to take its revenge. I lunch with the gentle poet, Wajdi Mallat, while his friend Aboussouan tells us of the murder of his family by the Stern Gang in Jerusalem. I dine with Riachy, *Iskandar dhu-al-Qarnayn,* whose long hands sketch roundnesses in the air as he describes the beauty of the Lebanese women, especially those of his Mountain, for whom angels have been known to abandon the heavenly hosts. To be sure, they were Jewish angels. Or I am at the President's ball, talking about pipelines with Takhieddine Solh, the Lebanese representative at the Arab League. He reminds me, but comically, in the rolling of his eyes, of the lovely Egyptian girl with whom I have been dancing. These people are charming, charming. But the mind is lying in wait. . . . In the great vaulted salon of the French consulate-general, Riachy seizes me, pumps my hand, gathers a grinning circle around us. "Our most dangerous visitor! Have you heard? He plots with the Opposition!" A long line of bearded rabbis come solemnly into the salon, following a gnome-like little leader who wears a black skull-cap and trembles with lively fat. But of course they are not rabbis. They are Maronite priests, Riachy tells me, or Syriacs; or dignitaries of the Greek Rite, or Armenians; those who have red facings on their robes are bishops. Riachy covers his eyes in horror. These people have infested his beloved Mountain since the time of Paul; their ancestors supplied cedars for Solomon's temple, and now they are eager to pay tribute to Ben-Gurion, the traitors. Any master will do, save the Arabs. He points out a Greek Orthodox with a magnificent headdress and, sitting in lonely grandeur in a corner, a stout specimen with a stubble of beard and an air of benign intransigeance. This one resembles the old Hebrew scholar of B'nai Agudeth in Newark, who haunted my dreams for a period when my mother was pleading with my father to have me confirmed and not let me grow into manhood like a heathen. My mother failed and I grew up, indeed, like a heathen, which does not prevent Raichy from smiling maliciously as he whispers into my ear that the stubble-faced stimulus to my memory is the Grand Mufti of the Lebanon, the highest-ranking Moslem prelate in the country. He has just returned from a visit to the Palestinian refugees, who are dying like flies in the south. Would I like to meet him?

Many of these people have blue eyes, like my mother. Nowhere else in the Arab world have I seen so many blue eyes, except among the Berbers and Chleuhs of North Africa; but, for the Arabs, the Maghreb was a land of conquered outposts, by the same token as Spain. The Lebanon, like Palestine, lay close to the source-lands of Arabism, where all the eyes were black. . . . And now young Khalil El-Khoury arrives, to lead me to the fantastic buffet. Raichy and I take leave of each other,

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saying "Just between us Semites," in unison, mingling our laughter. Khalil frowns, failing to understand our private joke. No doubt he thinks me an American and that is the end of the matter. Riachy, the old fox, suspects that there is something equivocal in my Americanism, as there is in his Arabism. The scandal is that he is right.

II

Whilst (on my way to Beirut) I was passing through Cairo, a city renowned in the Middle East for its slave-supported *douceur de vivre,* but at the moment so hot with misery and cur-like hatred that it was becoming increasingly dangerous for foreigners to walk in the streets, I could not help thinking of Arthur Koestler's paradox about the Jews. Koestler had come unexpectedly to dinner, one night, on the eve of his departure for Italy. His Italian mission rather unnerved him, he told us, for he had not practiced journalism for many years; in any case, he was in a very filthy mood. So he tried to refurbish his spirits by baiting various people, and finally attacked me for the name I bear, claiming that I had no right to it.

Now he was in ugly, crowded Tel Aviv, badly housed and soggy with boredom (according to his wife, whom I had lately seen in London) and—this was my own guess—disliking his fellows with an intensity which grew in the measure of his enforced proximity to them. Poor Koestler! Jews to the right of him, Jews to the left of him, volleying and thundering! My heart went out, or more precisely my heart would have gone out to him, had it not been entirely absorbed in his paradox, and in the problem of getting through Cairo.

I was due in Beirut, on a mission of peace and culture which had nothing, save very indirectly, to do with Palestine. I was already a day late. The slightest further delay, involving diplomatic intervention, would have embarrassed me and compromised my mission. Not to speak of the fact that Cairo bristled with guns and sabers, and scarred Sudanese troops who loved to use them, especially on pusillanimous and unarmed types like me.

Perhaps Koestler was right, and I had no business being Kaplan. But, right or wrong, the name was writ large on my passport. It is a word of German origin, meaning priest or chaplain. The most common patronymic in the Middle East also means priest, in Arabic, Khoury. But mine (which, of course, is not at all common in the Middle East) happens also to be the name of the Israeli Minister of Finance. . . . This was annoying, not simply because he might have been called Cohen or Greenberg, like anyone else, or because he might have changed his

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name Israeli-fashion to Eliezar ben-Khoury, or something of the sort. It was doubly annoying because, having handed over my obnoxious passport and gone tensely to wait outside the shack-like Control Building, I was shortly joined by a loud-mouthed British newspaperman who insisted on telling me an Israeli joke about my ministerial homonym. "But KAPLAN," he shouted at the end, "what does KAPLAN do all day?"

While he was hopelessly spoiling his punch-line, I made my way to a Coca-Cola machine, which emerged bright-red from a pile of sand nearby. I have an uneven sense of humor, under the best of circumstances. So I aspired singlemindedly to Coca-Cola, until I was joined by an Egyptian, who had been standing discreetly in the meager shadow of the shack. He helped me operate the machine and eagerly lapped up his drink, but fortunately did not insist on conversation. The sun was very hot and the passport-control seemed very, very long.

So I stood there, between the unsubtle Briton and this absurd and reassuring machine, meditating on the inconvenience of my name. . . . Koestler's argument was that it constituted a malevolent handicap, a gratuitous danger, and in this he was certainly right. To bear such a name was like wearing a yellow star, or a beard with earlocks; it placed me in a category to which I did not, in any fruitful way, belong. It exposed me and my children to massacre, simply because I hadn't the energy and courage of my apostasy. It obsessed me—said Koestler—with the problems of a mass of strange and rather outlandish people who meant nothing to me in particular, but who nevertheless became, *ex officio,* my brothers, comrades, accomplices. In short, it invaded my life, which should have been entirely applied to the problem of being; and forced it to turn always about the problem of being-a-Jew. Always, of course, was too much to say. Much too much. But the fact of the matter, he insisted, was that my name gave me nothing but trouble.

Koestler has since despatched a series of articles from Tel Aviv, in which he attempts to reduce this, our impatience and revolt, to a reason. Licking his chops, he argues that the establishment of Israel has made it possible, at last, to envisage the liquidation of the Jews, at least insofar as they are a phenomenon of the European Pale. On one hand, he makes a great point of the transformation of the European immigrants in Palestine, which he had already noted in his novel. In a single generation, or two, the stooped and flat-footed intellectual, with his moist palms and preconsumptive breath, becomes a blond and sun-tanned peasant, endearingly stupid. Furthermore, Israel is increasingly peopled by Middle Easterners and North Africans, who accelerate the general destruction of the "Jewish type."

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On the other hand, what becomes of those Jews who remain behind, in the Diaspora? They can only disappear, says Koestler. The Eastern European settlements are already dead, with their distinctive language and traditions. Their religion has long since transmitted its purely spiritual values to the Christian Occident; for the rest, it has survived merely as a mythology for the Return. But the Return is now a fact. The perspective ("Next year in Jerusalem . . . ") once operated as a principle of cohesion. *The reality now imposes a choice.* Let those who would be Jews make their way to the Jewish homeland. Let the others be warned that, with each generation, their Jewishness becomes more gratuitous and empty, bears less relation to the reality of Israel. And that their continued distinct existence in the West has become "an untenable anachronism."

Untenable—and dangerous. For centuries, says Koestler, quoting Dr. Weizmann, the Jews have "carried antisemitism in their knapsacks," simply because they were Jews. Those to whom the tradition meant nothing were morally deterred from apostasy and total assimilation, for such a course seemed to imply the cowardly abandonment of a people in distress. Now, in good conscience, they can be Englishmen, Dutchmen, Americans, provided they cease to be Jews. Let them disappear into the mass of their fellow-citizens. Let them cut every last link with a past which means nothing to them, except a sterile obsession and a promise of murder.

Waiting in Cairo for my passport, I found myself thinking of the old man who gave me my name. He was anti-religious, on the style of the village-atheist, and he had no desire to see Jerusalem; yet he would have laughed at the suggestion that he, or his son, could choose to be anything else than a Jew. What makes a pigeon a pigeon, he would enquire, ironically? We observe this bird and we agree to call it a pigeon. For my father, Koestler was a pigeon who, preferring to be an oriole, could not help detesting the other pigeons because they looked so insistently like him.

I, too, thought Koestler was wrong, but for far more scandalous reasons. Being the child, not only of my father but also of my time, I was aware that these birds, under new conditions, might indeed cease to look like pigeons. . . . But there was no time to work out this confusion. An immense black car came screeching to a halt near the control building, scattering a pack of sub-human wretches who were pretending to labor in the roadway. Out oozed a swarthy fat colonel, all booted, bestrapped and bemedalled. His bodyguard also emerged from

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the car and formed about him. Then they marched grimly into the shack.

III

Perhaps they were not as grim as all that. In any case, nothing happened. Vaguely, later, we heard that a woman had been smuggling textiles from Rome. We were shuttled across an empty strip of desert to another airport and there installed in a small courier of the Middle Eastern Airlines. We flew over the Nile delta and then out to sea, so as to avoid Israeli territory. Then I closed my eyes, we landed in Beirut, and my passport was there, despite my nightmare, in my pocket.

Weeks later, when I had come to love Iskandar Riachy, and he had learned that there was no mystery in my name, I told him the shameful story of my passage through Cairo. He laughed at my anguish. Since they had sent a colonel and four men, he told me, I might have known it was for a woman. For me, *comment donc,* they would have sent at least a batallion. . . . This jangled my newgrown Lebanese nerves, so that I stiffened and looked around the table for an Egyptian—or simply a Moslem. Riachy laughed again and added in a loud voice that the Egyptians were a lion-hearted people, and the Lebanese were also a lion-hearted people. The Iraqi, too, were a lion-hearted people, and the Transjordanians. These facts were well-established, for he had printed them himself in his newspaper.

The strange thing was that his irony was double. Riachy was an Arab, after all. He laughed at what he had said and yet he believed it. He laughed because he believed. There were cabinet ministers at the table, and other grave persons, Moslem and Christian and Druze. They also laughed, for they were no longer able to pretend that they had not heard. In the end, we were all laughing with Riachy, but we all had different reasons.

Reasons within reasons—I stand on the threshold of this unspeakably ancient world and strain my senses to distinguish the reasons. There is a constant and excruciating feeling of *déjà vu* and, at the same time, of lost liaisons, words almost but not quite understood. I live in the Lebanon as in a dream whose tone and abiding problem is my uncertainty. Not simply because these people nod when they mean no, shake their heads when they mean yes—that much one can learn, and the bare bones of language. But nothing is simple here, Wajdi Mallat warns me. This sweet and subtle scholar, with his perpetual frown and his tormented black eyes, has been assigned to act as my guide. He has a long dark face and curly black hair, an interminable Koranic

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forefinger, constantly raised in admonition. He is terrified by my ignorance and my bumbling Western coarseness. Just as the intervals in Arabic music are finer, he says, so the shades of meaning are more tenuous. There are people I must not see, words I must not use. Even Riachy is dangerous.

Why? Riachy is an Institution in the Lebanon, like the immemorial cedars, or the ruined temples of Baal. He is President of the Press Association; publisher, editor and (practically) sole reporter of the *Wandering Newspaperman,* an Arabic "weekly," which appears whenever the President has time to spare for it; his amorous affairs have been celebrated in Beirut since the days of the Ottoman Padischah; for several generations he has dabbled in everything, frequented everyone, mocked every idea of importance in the Middle East. Like a court-jester, Riachy is allowed a free tongue, *jusques au feu exclusivement.* But the privilege is not transferable.

Least of all, says Wajdi, *to you;* and for hours after, his long hands make cupping, soothing gestures to soften the blow. But I am more easily soothed than satisfied. I go off arm in arm that evening, like every evening, with Iskandar Riachy, who takes me to dine at his club and tells me that there are three things I must see in the Lebanon. One is obscene, the other is irrelevant. The third is the ex-president of the Republic, Emile Eddé.

A few days later, Emile Eddé's eldest son came to see me and asked me to visit his father. The latter, he said, welcomed the presence of our great cultural Conference as an opportunity to open the world's windows on the plight of his party, which had been robbed of the last elections and was now being hounded and gagged by the Sheikh Bechara el-Khoury. On the face of it, there was no reason why I should not accept this invitation, although young Eddé's rather furtive manner suggested that now, or never, was the time to consult Wajdi Mallat. I inclined towards never. In the routine of my daily work, I had begun again to wear my name as I wore my eyes and ears, without reflexion or precaution. The country was calm and remarkably unbelligerent. The Conference was proceeding smoothly. But Wajdi was bound to tell me what I already knew: that Eddé was detested by many Lebanese as the creature of the overthrown French mandate, and by some as the leader of a separatist tendency. He would tell me other things as well, I vaguely foresaw, and lift his arms to the sky and suffer abominably, which would render this visit impossible. But the more I thought of it, the more I wanted to go.

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I was being invited to spend an evening with one of the most passionate figures in Middle Eastern politics. And I had already seen enough of this country and this people to know that their politics were immensely momentous, *interesting,* to me in particular and to all my contemporaries. . . . Is it not difficult, then, to conceive my hesitation?

In Paris, it is difficult. In Beirut, not at all. The Lebanon is an unstable construction, delicately balanced between Christians and Moslems—and the mysterious Druzes, who seem to be neither the one nor the other. Eddé was opposed to this balance, i.e., opposed to the pact by which the country lived. He claimed that the predominately Moslem territories of the north and the south had been arbitrarily added to the country at the close of the French mandate. They were inhabited by large numbers of typical Arab fellahin, ignorant, impoverished and illiterate. The looked, not towards Beirut, but towards Damascus and Cairo. They were in no sense Lebanese.

The real Lebanon, the only one, was the "Mountain," the traditional fortress of Christianity in the Middle East, inhabited by devout peasants whose standard of living was comparable to that of the northern Italians, or even the French. These people, said Eddé, were not Arabs. They had their own *mores,* their own history; a remarkably prosperous one since the Capitulations of 1860. For centuries they had defended their high-perched monasteries, impervious to Islam. And they were now being sold by Bechara el-Khoury, a Christian himself, God forgive him, for fear of the wooden sabers of the Arab League. Bechara groveled before the Syrians, accepted every insult and economic disadvantage, did what he could to prove himself more Arab than the Arabs. But the real Lebanese knew that their enemies were not the white men in Tel Aviv, but the cynical Asiatic rulers of Damascus and Bagdad.

Such was the argument of Emile Eddé. I had had a taste of it already, racism and all, from his son. But whether or not the Mountain was being sacrificed to appease the Moslems, I knew that Eddé would not dare to say these things aloud. In the Lebanon, Christians and Moslems could not discuss each other in public except with the tortuous and over-insistent politeness which was born of their common anxiety. Anything more, or less, they viewed as incitement to murder.

There was something half-grasped and vaguely familiar in this communal obsession, something which filled me with a naive excitement, as though I were discovering the key to an old and terrifying dream. One looked at a map of the Fertile Crescent and found Syria, the Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Transjordan. One transferred to these ab-

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stractions a western synthesis involving, in each case, a fusion of people, language, mythology, and an ancestral attachment to a given land. But the concept, however made supple, refused to fit. These nations did not exist.

The first loyalty of the intellectuals was to their "means of production," the rich and beautiful Arabic language, to the mastery of which they had given up all the years of their youth; they thus kept alive an ideal of cultural unity in peace which had vanished from Middle Eastern reality since the Ommayyad and Abassid Khalifates, in the early Middle Ages. They refused to be Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian; they were Arab.

On the other hand, there was nowhere—except, precisely in the Lebanese Mountain—anything comparable to the western peasant's attachment to his land, or to the sacred character of the frontier, which was a consequence of it. Islam was the creation of camel-riding tribesmen —tradesmen and nomads—from Arabia; the islamized peasants despised their land and tilled it in a spirit of irremediable hopelessness and degradation. "This instrument is vile," said Mohammed of the plowshare, according to Ibn Khaldoun. "Art thou Arab or fellah?" says the mocking ragamuffin nomad to the miserable cropper who, for the sake of peace, pays him tribute. Pillaged by the nomad chieftains on the frontiers of the desert, drained by the cool green garden-like cities which gave the Moslem his imagery of paradise, the land lies scorched and half-abandoned, stony, unproductive, back-breaking wastes—the image of hell. Even so, it is everywhere enclosed—except, again, in the Lebanon —in a fantastically complicated, religiously sanctioned system of ownership, elaborated over the centuries by the slick Koran-quoting lawyers of the cities. In some regions, the peasant-workers receive as much as eighty-five percent of their crop; in others as little as five percent. The difference, one finds, is determined by an extremely simple principle: the peasant's share has in each case been fixed, after centuries of trial and error, at the barest subsistence-level. If the fertility of his land increases, he knows that his landlord, or his urban "protector," will find legal means of expropriating the surplus. Why, then, should he attempt to improve his land?

He is long past attempting. Perhaps he dreams of recovering his nomadic freedom. Or he burns madly in the mystic fervor of a new heresy. How is one to know what this mute fellow dreams? He labors, reproduces and dies. Is it not significant that aristocracy, amongst the Arabs, has no reference to the land? One is not Duke of this place, or Viscount of that. One traces one's ancestry back to a roaming tribesman

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of the Chosen Race, an uncultured tent-dweller, blood-brother of the Prophet, one of those extraordinarily insouciant creatures who came up from the desert to inherit the lushness of Damascus and Jerusalem, when the western and Sassanid empires—Greece, Rome, Byzantium, Persia—were dead.

These men used camel's urine to dress their hair. They were organized—as they are today, in Arabia—like gangsters, raiding each other for sport and spoil, subjecting the sedentary peasants to systems of "protection," pressing constantly against the frontiers of sedentary existence. From the dawn of history they had been spawned by the desert, driven by famine, spilling over—Assyrians, Chaldeans, Aaramaeans, Phoenicians, Hebrews and finally Arabs,—into the Fertile Crescent. This time they bore Islam on their lances. In the course of a few generations, they conquered the Fertile Crescent, Persia, North Africa and Spain. They even pushed as far as Tours, in France. Rapidly, they assimilated the culture, and the astounding wealth, of their victims. They built the Bagdad of the fabulous Haroun al-Raschid, conserved the heritage of antiquity and broadened the horizons of science, at a time when Europe lay fallow and barbarous under the gothic tribes. The empires they established were in turn invaded and devastated by Crusaders, Mongols and Turks, split by religious heresies, mined by the stubborn particularism of certain peoples, such as the Spaniards, the Persians—and the Maronite monks of the Lebanese Mountain. To cement these peoples, there was Islam and a language. But the enterprise was vitiated by Arabic polity, which was merely an extension of the old nomadic gangsterism. In the end, cities built by Roman governors were overrun by Mongols, covered with mounds of skulls and left to the enveloping sands. Irrigation ditches were abandoned. Whole areas were returned to the desert and lost, perhaps forever, to man.

Why do I recite this twice-told tale? Because it is still going on. The medieval Arabs created a rich and gracious urban civilization, supported on a social system which now lies like a corpse across the land. One cannot touch this system without cutting into the archaism of Islam. That much is unhappily clear. On the other hand, Islam left the heritage of Arabism, which today expresses itself, for example, in the Lawrencian "snobbery of the desert," and in the short-lived political triumph of Faysal, but which also implies with some truth that the Maronite Patriarch of Beirut and King Abdullah share a common language and culture.

This places the pan-Arabic intellectuals of Beirut before an impossible dilemma. They base their dream of the future on the universalism of

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Arabic culture, and on a certain democratic ethos which may be read into it. In short, they repeat the slogans of their fathers, for whom the "Arab Renascence" was a weapon against the Ottoman Turks. But, for the Moslems, Arabic culture is simply a function of Islam; and there can be no future until the Islamic land-system is swept away.

Here, precisely, is the knot of the Middle Eastern "Question." Without attacking the land-system, nothing can be done. But Islam is a walled city; to attack any part of it means war. And here, too, we approach the very source of my excitement. Why is Islam untouchable? Because, in this distantly familiar Orient, creeds are not simply communities of disinterested belief. They are, as the Turks called them, "nations," tightly coherent patterns of ritualistic practice and social organization. This fact, in a land where religion has for 5,000 years been a pretext for mutual butchery, is absolutely capital. And it must be seen in the light of another: the Maronite "nation," the Greek Orthodox "nation," the Alaowite "nation," are not coextensive with any particular territory: centuries of wars, invasions and religious dissensions, all marked with the ancient self-righteous ferocity of the semites, have scattered almost every sect, far from its place of origin, across the entire land. This means that each of these countries, which the Allies so cavalierly carved from the corpse of the Ottoman Empire, is a mosaic of mutually suspicious, if not hostile, religious groups. Each of these groups, including the orthodox (Sunnite) Moslems, has been and is, somewhere in the Middle East, a persecuted minority.

North of the Lebanon, in what is called Syria, there is a mountainous region which supports about 350,000 people. If you ask these people what they are, they refer not to the name of their country but to their sect. For the most part, they are Alaowites, Sunnite Moslems and Greek Orthodox Christians; but there are also communities of Maronites, Ismaelis, Gregorian Armenians and Greek Catholics; and, in lesser numbers, Catholic Armenians, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Druzes and Jews. *The diaspora is not, except in the West, a Jewish phenomenon. It is the normal mode of communal existence in the Middle East.*

So I went to see Eddé, one evening, and asked him what should be done. His answer was interesting, but obviously insufficient, since it bore only on the Lebanon. The rest of the so-called Arab world, he told me, was *indécrottable*: nothing could be done. The Lebanon, the real Lebanon, which was to say the Mountain, was Christian, literate, inherently prosperous; its role was to maintain its identity and mediate

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between the East and the West, not to lose itself in the medieval morass of the Moslem world. . . . This could not but strike me as anticlimactic, after all my hesitation and cogitation. Eddé himself was splendid, a vibrant, bull-necked man with protruding eyes. He lived in one of the most beautiful houses in the world. The next morning, as I went to my office, I was thinking rather of Eddé's house than of his ideas.

I found my office in an uproar. Poor Wajdi Mallat was caught in a swirl of reporters; he was tearing his hair, waving his arms, protesting to heaven. Upon my arrival, they abandoned him and made a beeline for me. I shut myself up in an adjacent room with Wajdi, and asked him what was going on.

This was disingenuous. I had left Eddé at midnight; Mallat had been informed of my visit at one A.M. Which was exactly what I might have expected. The "whole town," he told me, knew about it this morning. It was being interpreted as an unfriendly gesture with respect to Bechara el-Khoury, who had made a great point of being kind to us. It was being resented as an unwarranted intrusion in Lebanese politics. Finally he managed to bundle them out of the room. All except one—a redhaired, freckled fellow with blond eyelashes and a profoundly apologetic air. He slipped through the door, when Wajdi was gone, and presented me with a sheet of paper on which several questions had been typewritten, in comic English. The questions, of course, were invidious. Was it true that a toast had been born to the pseudo-State of Israel? Was it true that I had said X and Eddé had said Y? I laughed at them all, and asked the man whether he had installed a spy under the table. But while I was laughing he looked at me, through his blond eyelashes, and said:

"Is it true that you are a Jew?"

IV

The question was tactless, under the circumstances, and so—I fear—was my reply. Both lost their point through the devotion of Wajdi, who mobilized the government and our young friend Michel el-Khoury, and saw to it that the affair was smoothed over.

There was still, of course, the threat which hung over Riachy, and which was not dispelled for several days. I never knew, in any case, exactly in what it consisted. For the rest, I had deeply disturbed my friends, most of them young pan-Arab intellectuals, who came to me in a long series to beg me not to believe a word of what Eddé had said. This meant, again, hours and hours of painful discussion, in the course of

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which I began to feel that I understood the mechanism of their dream.

The Lebanon, they said, was not for nothing at the very source of the Arab Renascence; it was no accident that the first Arab printing press was assembled in their Mountain, and that the country had scattered its publicists and poets in every corner of the Middle East. The Lebanon was the land of tolerance, where Christians and Moslems shared the common heritage of Arabism and lived together in peace. Eddé stressed —for what murky ends?—the jealous particularism of the Mountain, its Christianity, its special economic status. But what of its democratic universalism? Could not this tradition, rooted in the mingled history of several peoples, all speaking the same language, unite the Arab world in a transnational and progressive culture? . . . The great obstacle, for the moment, was Zionism, with its racist and theocratic state, expropriating an Arab land, provoking nationalist and xenophobic reactions in the Arab masses.

And Islam? The best elements of Islam, they told me, were in Arabism; the rest would be transformed by the Lebanese catalyst and the ardor of the Moslem youth. The immediate problem was to convince the Moslem masses that the Lebanese were with them, and that the particularism of the Mountain was a thing of the Past.

Alas! This was even worse than Eddé's fierce separatism; there was no honesty in it. My young intellectuals spoke easily of convincing the fanatical tribesmen of Arabia, and the slave-masses of Egypt. Meanwhile, they allied themselves with Ibn Saoud and Farouk, who were active and unconvinced and, surely, more subversive than were the Zionists to "democratic univeralism." And here, of course, we come to the crux. My friends assured me that they were *also* inalterably opposed to Farouk and Ibn Saoud. Their revolution in the Middle East would not succeed until the Hachemites and Saoudites and, indeed, all the feudal dynasties were done with. For the moment, however, one could not—being Christian—denounce the Arab rulers in public. The latter were Moslems, after all. To denounce them would mean to sin against tact.

This, then, is the content of the famous Lebanese tolerance. The Republic, for want of a better bond, is united in a community of tact. But this tact only pretends to be tolerance: it is really terror. . . . The problem is not one of motive. We know, in any case, that tolerance operates in society *as though* it proceeded from a basic love and respect for the human creature. It expresses itself, whatever its subjective sanction, in types of social behavior which allow for difference, conflict, polemic. But polemic is unthinkable in the community of tact. Here, every angle is carefully rounded off; every inquiring movement is ar-

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rested on the safe side of its logical end. The result, in the Middle East, is an extraordinary intellectual sterility. There are, properly speaking, no great passions of thought, no profoundly assumed attitudes. All ideas are reduced to the same distressing shallowness. Even the Lebanon, with its almost total literacy and ancient respect for learning, has failed to produce a single cultural hero of international importance. . . . The sad proof of my point came always on the heels of this challenge. The answer, invariably, was Gebrane Khalil Gebrane!

Now, as the Conference drew to an end, one tried to forget that one could not hold the world close enough. Rheumatic professors made hasty trips to the ancient cities: Tyre and Sidon, Baalbek, Byblos, Palmyra; and climbed sheer slopes to reach the Krak of the Crusading Knights. The blind old poet, Taha Hussein, came down from Cairo to explain how the Arabs had fallen heir to Hellenism, a thousand-odd years ago. He also resembled my father. . . . Something was slipping away from us, half felt, half understood. Even the members of our mission, fatigued functionaries, were filled with the anguish of the Middle East.

What was one to do? I kept thinking of my father. How can one ever leave this obsessive land? I look up at the ancient Mountain, which rises straight from the sea: beyond, on all sides, lies *dar-el-Islam,* which means the land of submission to the will of Allah. On this side, a stronghold of unsubmissiveness: *dar-el-harb,* land of war.

It is Riachy who pronounces the words for me, in his beloved language. We are talking, as usual, of the problem of the Mountain, which once sent its sons to colonize Carthage, and almost conquered Rome. Today, the Lebanese colonize Africa again, and America, whence Riachy concludes that nothing has changed. I tell him how my father, in his very great age, left my mother and my sisters in New Jersey and set out for Texas, where he proposed to build a new life. Everyone tried to prevent this folly, my mother wept, old friends came in delegations, begging him not to go. But my father refused to believe that he was too old to conquer Texas.

Riachy is anxious to know my father's age, which I tell him. This fills him with fury.

"Old! You call that old! I pity thy father for having spawned such a blockhead! Old!"

He has promised, this Sunday morning, to take me to a nearby village, where the ancient Astarte cults have left—he swears—an extraordinary eroticism in the air. But he has spent the night gambling at his club and it is already late. His house is swarming with his children, all talking, quarreling and asking for money at once. Colette, his rav-

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ishing daughter, takes me aside and advises me not to let him drive me to Kfar Afca. There's nothing left of Astarte, she says, only a house of ill-fame and a chapel in honor of the Mother of God! Shall we go to see the Patriarch, instead? A great, a fantastic man, says Iskandar, who always covers his eyes in mock-horror at the sight of a priest. At bottom, he is proud that so many members of his family have taken the robe, but he insists that there is not a pious man amongst them. . . . We end by deciding, once again, to drive up into the Mountain.

O delectable Mountain! Its ancient problem is now all mingled with mine. Riachy points out monasteries on the hill-tops, so lovingly terraced, tells an endless series of tales in which Assyrians are confused with Sumerians, Averroes with Avicenna; and the profoundest continuum of the Middle East emerges in the ubiquitous sex-cults, still secretly practiced (he claims) under the cover of Christianity and Islam. There is a lively tradition of pornography in Arabic literature; the obscene is not an accident or an outburst but a mode, like the tragic and the comic. Having recovered this tradition, Riachy is called the Voltaire of the Middle East. He is a brilliant man, with a taste for juicy language and an original sensibility. Is it not significant that, after all these weeks, I can form no clear idea of what this Voltaire thinks?

No matter. Watching the ancient slopes dip and rise, revealing the blue sea, I tell Iskandar Riachy that the Lebanon does indeed offer a solution to the Middle East, not in its empty tact but in its Mountain. The solution, God knows, is a dangerous one; but, having once seen the ageless misery of the fellah, one cannot think the danger too great. If the Lebanese intellectuals are earnest in their desire to transform the Middle East, they must neither deny the particularism of the Mountain nor abstract it (as Eddé does) from the Arab world; they must use its example and its enduring strength, deliberately, in order to hasten the disintegration of Islam. Etcetera etcetera. Riachy has fallen asleep.

And I, too, am falling asleep.

We have left Damascus behind, and the Mediterranean coastlands. There is nothing but the pink suspicion of dawn, under the luminous clouds. This evening I shall be in Paris, in my thirtieth year, and it is time to decide who I am. I shall write a letter to my father. Arthur Koestler is sitting in my studio, denouncing the gratuitous provocation of my name. What right do I have to bequeath this disease to my children? That is for my children to decide. . . . Sartre claims that we are created in the eyes of the others. We are *seen* into the situation of the Jew. Koestler rejoins that there is little, now, for the eye to take hold of. Let the Jew abolish that little, and the situation disappears.

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But what safety is there for any man, in a world which cannot assimilate this difference? And what pride? And what adventure? And what is to become of our world, when all the differences are gone? *La-ilah-illa-Allah,* there is no God but Allah. So Islam in decadence strips us of our manhood, leaves nothing but submission to an impoverished and petrified will.

A simple, unambiguous will. I shall tell my father that I have never particularly wanted to be a Jew. I have wanted to construct my own difference; to choose my own causes and comrades. This much he will surely understand. . . . And, of course, I shall tell him about the Lebanon. It is not certain whether the Mountain will ever speak clearly and boldly with Islam, or whether the only perspective is tact. Or blind war. The Mountain is a sign, an ambiguous sign. But if we begin by submitting to the world's distaste for ambiguity, what value, or hope, can there be in our dialogue at all?

I close my eyes and dream a lovely letter. Is not the world made richer, and more human, by those who take a passionate interest in reasonableness and courage, if only because of their names? I tell the old man that I am happy he's gone to Texas. When I was a child, I saw him always with a hammer in his hand, building houses. He has covered New Jersey with houses. Never mind, there is plenty of land, and much to learn, in Texas. *I and my companions were old and tardy,* says Ulysses, *when we came to that narrow pass, where Hercules assigned his landmarks, to hinder man from venturing further. . . . 'O brothers,' I said, 'who through a hundred thousand perils have reached the West, deny not to this, the brief remaining vigil of your senses, experience of the unpeopled world behind the Sun.' . . .* And so they turned their poop toward morning, until *there appeared to us a Mountain, dim with distance; and to me it seemed the highest I had ever seen.* But a tempest arose from the new land and Ulysses was destroyed.

As pleased Another, he tactlessly says.

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ROME LETTER

ITALIAN MOVIES

The friendliest gathering in Rome these days was the first showing of *Ladri di Biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves), the latest picture by Vittorio De Sica, the author of *Shoe-Shine,* at the Barberini Theater. There, every Sunday morning, through the fall and winter, the *Circolo Romano del Cinema* offers its members a preview of the best Italian movies, or the exclusive showing of some carefully selected foreign film. A rite that puts the Barberini Theater half-way between Hollywood's Chinese Theater and New York's Museum of Modern Art. Producers, directors, stars, mix with cinema aesthetes, literary people, assorted highbrows, and representatives of the *quartieri alti,* that is, Rome's Park Avenue. The gathering is usually quiet and formal. The movie is introduced with a speech by one of the most prominent Italian *filmologhi* (a term that indicates, in highbrow Italian movie language, anybody who deals with the cinema in a scholarly way, keeping at a convenient distance from the promiscuous world of actual movie-making). During the projection, filmologists and aesthetes greet with a peremptory clapping of the hands those passages, sequences, close-ups, and single scenes which seem to them to deserve well of the Muse. After the showing, outside the theater (which ushers and charwomen in the meantime rush to make ready for the Sunday crowds), the audience breaks up into small groups of analysts who evoke the hallowed names of Eisenstein, Dreyer, Flaherty, Ford, and appraise the latest achievement in the light of the great examples of the past: a regular academy. After which ceremony, the maiden movie may begin its career among the profane masses. It may be a complete flop or a great popular success. For the membership of the *Circolo Romano del Cinema* the only verdict that counts is their own. What the ordinary moviegoer will consider a solid block of boredom may live forever in their memory on account of a single shot in which all the gestures of the heroine are kept rigorously inscribed within a triangle. On the other hand, even though they do not

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systematically despise money-making pictures, they insist on liking them for reasons altogether different from those of the common herd. (They can't get over King Victor's putting his signature on *Duel in the Sun.* They wouldn't touch Technicolor with a pole).

With *Bicycle Thieves,* however, things were altogether different at the Roman Cinema Club. That Sunday, at the Barberini, filmologists and smart people were completely submerged by the haughtiest crowd that ever attended a preview: the actors of the film, with their families, their families' friends, their acquaintances, their acquaintances' acquaintances, etcetera. They all came in their Sunday best from the poor sections and suburbs of Rome, where (with the help of a few radio announcements) De Sica had picked up his stars one by one. The theater was packed, and the *Circolo Romano del Cinema* looked very much like an oldfashioned aristocratic clique easily and cheerfully upset by a coup d'état from below. The only recognized authority there was De Sica, a gray-haired, handsome, smartly dressed gentleman, who sat smiling among his people, looking like sweetness itself: a kind of clean-shaven Santa Claus, happier at having been able to make movie-backers pay for the camel hair overcoat of Enzo Stajola (the six-year-old boy who is the acclaimed star of Bicycle Thieves) and the gorgeous pony skin furcoat of his mother than at having finished another movie. Those new clothes on the backs of people who are still living in dreary Roman slums were in fact a tangible acquisition. While the director of *Shoe-Shine* knew very well that, no matter how successful, his latest work could never be but a *succes d'estime* in box-office terms, Italian moving-pictures, even when they become famous all over the world, make just enough money to leave their financial backers lukewarm to any future project of the same kind.

There was no polite clapping of hands that Sunday, at the Barberini. There was real applause. When the show was over, there was a good fifteen minute bedlam. People screamed "Long live De Sica." De Sica stood up and bowed for a couple of minutes, then went into hiding leaving his actors, from small Enzo Stajola to Lamberto Maggiorani (a factory worker who, De Sica explains, has the same job as Chaplin in *Modern Times*), the easy prey of the people's love. Outside the theater, the most important theoreticians of the Cinema Club went around collecting autographs from the cast. Nobody mentioned Eisenstein. All that the ladies from the *quartieri alti* cared about was a chance at "eating up" little Enzo. The chance was refused. Protected by a triple line of relatives, the new star was allowed, from time to time, a little handwaving above the heads of the crowd from the uplifted arms of his father. Vit-

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torio Antonucci, the eighteen-year-old boy who played the villainous bicycle thief, the only member of the cast who did not seem to have made enough money to get a new suit, kept staring into space while people milled around him, and yelled: "Look, the thief." Finally he shrugged his shoulders and made for the bus.

The fact is that the whole ceremony was very much like a family reunion, in which the movie itself had the function of the family scrapbook. With the help of a thin anecdote about a poor worker whose bicycle is stolen, and who roams through all the poorest, and the most characteristic, sections of Rome, dragging around his little boy for a whole Sunday in the attempt to catch up with the thief, De Sica has succeeded in making the most charming and skillful of all the many movies about Rome at which the directors of the so-called "neo-realistic" school have tried their hand. Nine tenths of De Sica's talent consists in knowing exactly what he can do, and doing it with great diligence and patience. He directs a movie much the same way as Stanislawski directed a play. A scenario is to him a series of notes indicating places and atmospheres that he wants to use. Then come weeks and weeks of careful work on the spot, which involves getting really to know every milieu that is going to be represented, even in details that will never appear on the screen. Since the war, fortune tellers have become a very important part of Italian life. The scenario of *Bicycle Thieves* required two scenes in a fortune teller's room. De Sica's collaborators had discovered a woman seer who, they thought, was inimitable, and tried to bribe her into acting her own part, in her own apartment. The woman was incorruptible. The only solution left was to go to her place day after day, posing as her clients, and noting down every detail, from the awed whispers of people waiting in the corridor to be received by the "holy woman" to the hundreds of sacred images and fetishes hanging on the walls of the sybil's temple. In due time, the mental photographing was completed. The whole thing had to be reconstructed, and the right actors found. It took a lot of time and trouble, since De Sica didn't want any professional actors. But De Sica is ready to wait as long as necessary to get the right touch. He knows Rome, loves the Roman way of life, enjoys catching it on film, and, as people say of him, he could lure even a sack of potatoes into acting. In his latest picture, he has put every bit of his capacities to good use, and is being rewarded with a lot of applause, a moderate amount of cash, and a few attacks from certain quarters, for having "defamed Italy and the Italian character"—an accusation to which Italian movie directors are by now getting accustomed.

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Bicycle Thieves, which is by a long shot the best Italian movie of 1948, has cost eighty million lire (about one hundred and forty thousand dollars), eight months of groundwork and preparation, and two months of actual shooting. David Selznick, who had kept an eye on De Sica since *Shoe-Shine,* and who is now trying to convince him to come to Hollywood, had first wanted to produce the picture, with Cary Grant in the main role. The story goes that the deal fell through because De Sica refused to modify the script, whose final scene required that the hero be slapped in the face by an angry crowd, when, in a futile attempt to get back at life, he tries in his turn to steal a bicycle from somebody. The American producer said that an American audience couldn't possibly stand for Cary Grant's being slapped without fighting back and giving 'em hell. On the other hand, if Cary Grant were allowed to fight back, it would have meant that he didn't feel guilty for making away with other people's property, and social morality would have lost whatsoever was gained by national pride. The problem was found insoluble, and the project dropped. De Sica found some backers, and produced the film himself, which is what he vastly prefers.

With Romans, *Ladri di Biciclette* has had all the success an Italian movie can hope for. There was nothing comparable, however, to the crowds that stood in long lines waiting for a chance to see *Duel in the Sun.* And in Turin, the film (which is done in Roman dialect) almost antagonized the Piedmontese, contemptuous of anything that comes from south of the Po river. In New York and Paris it will probably be successful, and that's finally where the producer hopes to find some financial justification for his venture. As said above, a good Italian movie, even if it is a success, can never make enough money in Italy. The reasons are simple.

Movie box-office receipts are, in Italy, about thirty billion lire (fifty million dollars) a year. Fifty percent of this sum goes to the State in the form of entertainment tax. Of the remaining part, the producers get from fifteen to eighteen percent. This is fine for Metro Goldwin-Mayer or Twentieth Century Fox, for whom the Italian market is just gravy. For Italian producers the story is different. The difference starts from the fact that every year Italian audiences are shown eight hundred foreign movies (mostly American, of course) against fifty Italian ones. Profits are shared accordingly. Briefly stated, no Italian movie, however successful, can make more than a hundred million lire, while, from the producer's point of view, the business of movie-making would begin to be attractive only at the level of about four hundred million lire. But *Bicycle Thieves,* for example, will make a maximum net profit of twenty

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million lire (less than thirty-three thousand dollars). To help Italian movie-makers out, the State gives back ten percent of the entertainment tax to ordinary Italian films, and sixteen percent to those considered to have "cultural merit." But, in order to profit from this help, Italian movies have to have a longer run than is usual. Movie theater owners have no preference for the national product. Any B grade American film will draw more people than De Sica's or Rossellini's best work. Only musicals based on Neapolitan songs, Neapolitan bosoms, Vesuvius and the Madonna, can hope to compete with the Hollywood product. Hence, the State pitches in again, with a law that orders all movie theaters to have Italian movies on the program for at least eighty days a year, under penalty of a three hundred thousand lire fine (about five hundred dollars). Theater owners (especially in the provinces, pay the fine occasionally), and keep on making money on Hollywood.

All this means that, in Italy, the better the movie, the more important financially the foreign market. *Open City* and *Shoe-Shine* got some financial reward from American and French, rather than Italian, movie-goers. Such being the case, many people in Italy go around asking that the State do for the Italian movie industry at least as much as the French government does to protect French films against American competition. These people are now dangerously near the realization of their wishes. Any such event, however, would be a disaster, both artistically and economically, for everybody except the producers of Neapolitan musicals. After the war, Italy gambled the little she had on a free market policy. If Italian studios are busy now, it is because French, British, and American producers find it convenient to work in Italy, where they can count on low costs and no interference by the Government. Investing frozen box-office profits in making movies in Italy is a sound business proposition. The moment the Italians attempted to go back to the kind of protectionism they practiced in the days of fascism, they would expose themselves to deadly retaliations and unemployment. In fact, if they have been able to rebuild and re-equip their studios ruined by bombings and German looting, it is largely due to foreign investments.

This is not all. Talented directors like Rossellini, De Sica, De Sanctis, Camerini, and the others also have a vested interest in the free competition system. Money coming from State-protected profits would be very bad money for them, since it would automatically mean going back to State controlled movies, a regime of preventive censorship which would make the production of decent pictures almost as difficult as it was under fascism, together with the placing of a premium on mediocrity. This the good directors dread more than anything, and so does the

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public. Everybody in Italy knows that whatever intelligent movies have been made since 1945 were possible only because the Government could not, and would not, interfere.

In Italy, however, censorship like protectionism, is a real threat. The new trend in movie-making, usually labelled "neo-realistic," and of which the pictures that have already been shown in New York are good examples, is utterly unpopular with officialdom as well as with certain powerful sections of public opinion. After *Shoe-Shine,* De Sica's name became anathema within the walls of the Ministry of Justice, and more especially among the officials of the Department of Correction. De Sica had dared to show life inside a prison. The officials didn't say that what he had shown was false. They said it was "a smear on Italy's honor." No person connected with the movies is now allowed to walk across the gates of an Italian penitentiary. Even such a goodnatured and mildly humorous work as *Bicycle Thieves* has aroused the wrath of no less an organ than the Vatican paper, the *Osservatore Romano,* because of a scene where some gentle fun is poked at the way charity is administered by certain Catholic organizations. Here too, the argument was that De Sica besmirches his country by showing "only the dingy side of things." If restrained, well-mannered De Sica can irritate hidebound conservatives, less cautious "neo-realistic" directors like Luigi Zampa, the author of a rather pitiless film about the Fascist period, *Anni Difficili* (Difficult Years), have seen their work denounced in Parliament as "an attempt to exploit the misfortunes of the Fatherland." The Government did not directly heed the wishes of those who asked for the outright suppression of Zampa's film, but the fact is that, after a short run at Rome's swankiest movie theater, *Anni Difficili* has disappeared from circulation.

Caught as they are between the Scylla of financial difficulties and the Charybdis of State protection, the career of Italian independent movie producers is more precarious than it would seem at first sight. One of the few reasons for remaining optimistic about it lies in the fact that people have not forgotten the absurdity of a nationalism which discouraged indigenous talent while claiming constantly that it did nothing but protect national resources and prestige. This was particularly apparent in the field of motion pictures. Thanks to a skillful combination of censorship, protection, and squandering, the Fascist regime succeeded in scaring the public away from Italian movies. Mussolini's censorship was particularly obnoxious since it refused to put down any set of rules, and acted under the inspiration of the moment. Everybody knew that

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you couldn't show murder; suicide; people in rags; slums; lovemaking between an unmarried, or unbetrothed, man and woman; an Italian singing a love song ("Italians sing only when they work, or when they march," said one official), and so on. Everybody also knew that any series of picture postcards on Italy's beauty, power, or civilizing mission, as well as any big spectacle about ancient Rome, with elephants, naval battles and the Consul's triumph, would find the capital necessary to its production. But the trouble was that you couldn't possibly make out what Mussolini's son meant when, placed as he was at the head of Italy's Hollywood, Cinecitta, he proclaimed that "The Italian cinema must be healthy and luminous . . . because Italy *is Light*." One could produce what he thought the coziest, rosiest, and most kosher picture, and still be struck by the censor's lightning. In a movie directed by Mario Camerini, there was a home-coming Italian American who, seeing from the train the field where he had met his first love, wanted to get off instantly and pulled the emergency cord. The conductor came around, and fined him. The man took out a big bill, gave it to the State railroad official, and made for the open country. The distribution of the film was stopped. "You didn't show the conductor giving back the change," explained the censor, "People abroad might think that Italian civil servants take bribes." The whole first scene of the picture had to be done over, with considerable expenditure and trouble. After which the Duce passed the movie-makers in review, and told them: "I give you one simple order: be the first." And the Minister of Popular Culture added: "Your movies must be about a society, ours, that, as distinguished from Fance, has increased the birth-rate, where delinquency is on the wane and ethical values are kept high not only by the State, but also in the life of the family and of the individual." How one could make movies on (faked) statistics, the Minister didn't explain.

Such things are still very much present to the memory of Italian motion-picture people. For the time being, the "neo-realists" feel protected by public opinion, and the renown they have gained abroad. "Neo-realism" has in fact become a catchword and a slogan, as well as a stock formula in all highbrow dissertations about the recent developments of Italian picture-making. There have even been two Belgian Dominican friars (one of them being Father Morlion, a prominent teacher at the *Pro Deo* Institute, in Rome, and a member of the Motion Picture Censorship Commission) who have written an article on "The Philosophical Basis of Neo-realism in the Italian Cinema," which tries to prove that Italian postwar pictures are in perfect agreement with Aristotelian and Thomistic metaphysics, insofar as their

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"realism" is founded on, and tempered by, a profound belief in the spiritual nature of reality.

People who are neither theologians nor aesthetes, however, insist that "neo-realism" means just four or five excellent movies, and that it was born out of two facts: poverty and the collapse of fascism. Libero Solaroli, a modest and intelligent movie-maker, in the course of a conversation put it in the following way: "All this talk about 'neo-realism' doesn't make much sense. Foreigners admire our movies because their subject matter is new to them, much as the Roman *osteria* looked new and exotic to Stendhal. This is fine. But, talking among ourselves, the first thing to say is that we had a big stroke of luck: the destruction of the movie studios, plus the talent of men like Rossellini and De Sica. But neither De Sica nor Rossellini were new to the movies when they made *Open City* and *Shoe-Shine*. De Sica had been first an actor in the legitimate theater, and then an actor in the movies for fifteen years. He started directing pictures in 1940, and it seems to me that he belongs to the same family as René Clair rather than to the so-called 'neo-realistic' school. As for Rossellini, he started directing in 1941, and if you mean that, the movies being essentially a realistic medium, and Rossellini a good director, he is necessarily a 'neo-realist,' it's all right with me, but what's the point of it?

"The truth is that neo-realism is not a style of picture-making. It indicates a moment in our history: the war with its miseries, and its brutal undressing of social conventions and the human character. Movie directors lived in the streets and on the roads, then, like everybody else. They saw what everybody else saw. They had no studios and big installations with which to fake what they had seen, and they had little money. Hence they had to improvise, using real streets for their exteriors, and real people in the way of stars. Of course some people were better than others at seizing the opportunity that was offered them. More than this I wouldn't say, especially since success itself is a danger, and a sound Italian motion picture industry still remains to be built. What we have now is on one hand one of those felicitous improvisations at which we Italians excel, and on the other hand a marginal speculation on the part of a number of capitalists for whom the sale of a few movies abroad is just a trick to get around Government regulations on the export of valuta."

However questionable as an aesthetic formula, "neo-realism" certainly corresponds to a state of mind which was already widespread among Italian movie-fans in the years of fascism, became contagious around 1942, and found its first aggressive realization in 1943, with *Obsession*,

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the first screen version of *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* conceived and directed by Luchino Visconti, a talented young member of the illustrious and wealthy Milanese family. Visconti, who had already won applause as a modern-minded stage director, decided to risk challenging fascist censorship with a picture which showed nothing but poverty, gloom, and blunt passion. *Obsession* was a slow and clumsy picture, but it was done with obvious enthusiasm and faith. When the Government clamped down on it, it became a symbol, and the banner of "neo-realism." Filmologists still speak of it with reverence. Visconti has now just put out his second movie, *La Terra Trema* (The Earth Shakes), which has proven to be a case in point for those who maintain that "neo-realism" threatens to become a rhetorical attitude. *La Terra Trema* should have been the last word in realism, since it is a picture about a Sicilian fishing village, spoken in Sicilian, and acted by the local people. Actually, in spite of some excellent photography, it is a phoney. It is a surprisingly naive attempt to force the story of the nineteenth century novel by Verga, *The Malavoglia,* into a modern setting. Verga had described a family of fishermen whose attempt to have a business of their own is ruined by a storm. Visconti tried to charge Verga's plot with social significance by having a gang of villainous wholesale dealers the real cause of the downfall of the Malavoglia. The trouble is that there is no such thing as a wholesaler in Acitrezza, the village where the picture actually takes place. Fishermen there have eliminated intermediaries by working on a cooperative basis, and are relatively well off. But one should add that even without this basic violation of the tenets of realism, the picture would still have all the faults of a propaganda movie.

Realism however is a useful orientation for Italian movie-makers. To start with, there is the fact that, as a whole, Italy is a country whose people and ways of life are less known than many think. From Stendhal to Norman Douglas, and D. H. Lawrence, foreigners traveling in Italy have again and again discovered people and places which Italian writers themselves ignored or took for granted. Those were precisely the aspects of Italy that fascism tried to suppress in favor of a historical-bureaucratic fiction, with the result that intelligent Italians were made hungry for the *other* Italy, that is for everything that contradicted, or didn't fit in with, the official image. Which, among other things, explains the tremendous success of Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli.*

Under Mussolini, young directors had tried to escape from censorship by making documentary films. It was a way of uncovering "restricted" realities without making any comments. But it wasn't always

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safe. One of the best films of this kind, *Il pianto delle zitelle* (The Lament of the Old Maids), by G. Pozzi-Bellini, which tried to describe the famous yearly pilgrimage of a whole population of Central Italy to the sanctuary of Montevergine, could never be shown to the public. The taste for the documentary film still remains at the basis of the neo-realist tendency. What the neo-realists really want is to get the camera's eye anywhere they like, to be free to explore the remotest corners of Italy, and bring back as much photogenic material as they can. As a young movie-critic puts it: "We have the factories of Milan and Turin. But we have also, together with the cave-dwellers of Apulia and Calabria, a village on the Gargano promontory which was literally discovered the other day by a doctor. This village has been practically cut off from the external world since time immemorial. People there do not know about electric light or the razor, and live like a poor tribe about 100 or 200 A.D. . . . Neo-realism to us means simply that we have found a way of bringing such facts into the open, and don't want to shut up for a long, long time." Or, as Cesare Zavattini, one of the most successful scenario-writers, puts it: "We want to empty the bag." But, as it has been shown in the case of *Anni Difficili* and *Ladri di Biciclette* in Italy, the urge to shut people up, and keep bags sealed, has not died with Fascism.

Nicola Chiaromonte

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THEATER CHRONICLE

OLD GLAMOUR, NEW GLOOM

It would seem that the success of Arthur Miller's, or Elia Kazan's, *Death of a Salesman* has been due largely to the feeling of depression with which one makes for the exit. The idea is that anything that can make you feel that glum must be good, true and above all important—and publicity aside, it must be admitted that this culturally lace-curtain notion has a few things to support it these days at the Morosco. These are, notably, a superb performance by Lee Cobb as the salesman, a beautifully flexible and elegant stylization of a small Brooklyn house by Jo Mielziner, and a production so slick and fast that you have hardly the time or the presumption to question it. Unfortunately, however, it becomes necessary to question just what it is that gives the play its brilliant down-in-the-mouth effect, since it would surely be hard for any but its most insensitive admirers to deny that although they came out from it stuffed full of gloom, they were strangely lacking in a sense either of pity or of illumination.

They have seen a good, or good enough, man driven to suicide, a family in despair, an illusion shattered, and a portrayal of American life that should, it seems, have given them the sharpest pang of all; they have been expressly invited to indulge the tragic sense and to carry away a conception of man's fate as though from a production of *Oedipus Rex,* and what they have carried away instead is just that curious, rankling gloom. As the salesman's wife puts it after he has thrown himself under a train: "I can't cry. I want to cry, but I can't." If an honest poll could be taken it might well turn out that a large majority of these admirers, including the critics, had been secretly telling themselves not only after the play but during it that they were not really bored, just a little tired that night. Or was it perhaps that the tragic sense with all it has undergone from the facts of recent times needs now some entirely different, some unimaginably new appeal, and this was too much to ask

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of a play?—better be grateful for this. But of course there is no reason to be grateful for something that pretends to be what it is not, and the fact of the matter is that these secret whisperings, if they occurred, were well justified. The play, with its peculiar hodge-podge of dated materials and facile new ones, is not tragedy at all but an ambitious piece of confusionism, such as in any other sphere would probably be called a hoax, and which has been put across by purely technical skills not unlike those of a magician or an acrobat.

Up to a point this might be considered no more than the usual operation of the second-rate mind as glamorized by Broadway. But there is a particular twist to the matter this time, which helps to explain how a subject that in its general lines was run ragged fifteen or twenty years ago should be able to turn up now as a vehicle for such large claims and such ponderous emotionalizing.

Certainly as representing the false dream aspect of American society Mr. Miller's salesman offers nothing very original. The old gag about the installment-plan frigidaire ("Once in my life I'd like to own something outright before it's broke") are evidently still good for a laugh, and there is always a pocket of pathos reserved for the mortgage, but things have been sadder and funnier before. A slightly fresher breeze does blow at moments. Willy Loman calls for a genuine smile or two with his distinction between being "liked" and being "well-liked," and the perception behind this is accurate enough, even though in context it becomes one of the half-truths typical of the play. Willy's rock-bottom faith has been in the capacity to get along with people, to "make a good impression"; it is with this faith that he slides to old age and ruin while his brother Ben, who appears in some well-staged flashbacks, piles up a fortune in Alaska, and because of it at the end he is still pushing his favorite son Biff toward a failure worse than his own, the irony, as presented, lying not so much in the failure as in the denial of the man's true nature and talents along the way. Willy liked to work with his hands and had been happy when he was making a cement porch; and Biff, who had been happy as a ranch-hand in the West, has at the time of the play restlessly driven himself back home. In the end, after the suicide, it is the flashy son Hap, content with cheap success and easy women, who speaks of the salesman's dream as having been "good." Biff knows better—the dream was rotten though he speaks of his father nevertheless as a "prince"—and the wife knows better still; Willy was as good "as many other people." In short, he is the common man, and something or other has gone terribly wrong. The point is, what and why.

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At first blush the answer seems fairly simple. Willy has a fatal flaw. He lives in a dream world; he can't face reality; he has always had excuses for his own failures ("the shop was closed for inventory") and has ruined Biff's life by indulging him all through his childhood in any whim including theft. It is a good theme. But it turns out not only that the author is saying a good deal more than this, but that he is also either very unclear as to his further meanings, or very anxious to present them and evade responsibility for them at the same time. It is, of course, the capitalist system that has done Willy in; the scene in which he is brutally fired after some forty years with the firm comes straight from the party line literature of the 'thirties, and the idea emerges lucidly enough through all the confused motivations of the play that it is our particular form of money economy that has bred the absurdly false ideals of both father and sons. It emerges, however, like a succession of shots from a duck-blind. Immediately after every crack the playwright withdraws behind an air of pseudo-universality, and hurries to present some cruelty or misfortune due either to Willy's own weakness, as when he refuses his friend's offer of a job after he has been fired, or gratuitously from some other source, as in the quite unbelievable scene of the two sons walking out on their father in the restaurant. In the end, after so much heaping of insult on injury, all one really knows about Willy Loman is that if the system doesn't kick him in the teeth he will do it himself—a well-known if wearisome tendency, that in itself might have dramatic possibilities, but that is neither particularly associated with salesmen nor adapted to the purposes of this play.

What it does lend itself to in this case is an intellectual muddle and a lack of candor that regardless of Mr. Miller's conscious intent are the main earmark of contemporary fellow-traveling. What used to be a roar has become a whine, and this particular piece of whining has been so expertly put over that it has been able to pass for something else, but behind all the fancy staging the old basic clumsiness and lack of humor are there. To be sure there are a few moments of ordinary Broadway sprightliness, as in the matter of the ice-box, or Hap's little performance with the girls in the restaurant, but these are in passing.

The crucial scenes, like the general conception, are all heavily dead-pan, to an extent that floors the talents of every actor in the play but Mr. Cobb; Cameron Mitchell and Arthur Kennedy as the two sons do as well as possible with the script but both are driven by it at various points to over-act, and Mildred Dunnock in the part of the wife is obliged to keep up a tension of high-pitched nobility that would wear

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out one's tragic sense long before the end even if nothing else did. As for the clumsiness, it shows not only in the large aspects of the play but, rather surprisingly considering the general technical excellence of the job, in a number of small ones too. That the much-stressed point of Willy's being deprived of working with his hands, and of his pride in that, is not a specific reflection on the money standards which are central to the play's action, but as remarked on by many writers over the last hundred years, has to do with modern mechanized society in whatever form, could perhaps be passed over. But nothing excuses the triteness and pseudo-psychoanalytic nature of the Boston scene, dragged in to explain Biff's failures, though he would have been far better perceived as a contemporary character without it. It is also annoying not to know what the salesman sells, and whether or not the insurance is going to be paid after his death, and to have the wife say in her final speech that they were just getting out of debt, with no previous explanation of how, and when in fact we have just seen Willy getting further into debt.

These are details, but they indicate something of the speciousness of the play, which manages at every point to obscure both the real tragedy and the real comedy of the material. Willy is presumed to be losing his mind because he talks to himself, which permits the long series of flashbacks that give the play its illusion of liveliness, a form of madness that can at least, in the case, be called convenient; but all of us have seen and probably most of us have experienced delusions wilder and more illuminating than this. In the picture of Biff's unhappy restlessness Mr. Miller gives an impression of contemporaneity, but that is all; the true malaise of men of thirty now is a great deal more terrible than what happens to anyone in this play, and would not be a subject for a Broadway success. And so on. The play is made of such semi-perceptions, as can easily be appreciated by a glance at Eudora Welty's story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman," published some years ago.

There are of course many possible approaches to the character of the salesman, and Miss Welty was humble in hers, but she succeeded nevertheless in some twenty pages in creating a figure of loneliness and haunting futility that conveys a truly tragic sense, and remains as a clear, echoing symbol in the mind. The story makes no claims, it says only what it has to say, at its own sure quiet pace, and its limitations are never violated, but it strikes deep and has been deeply felt and so they become irrelevant. If one chooses to take it that way, this is as strong a condemnation as one could wish of one of the abnormal, humanly stultifying aspects of our society, as represented by one of its most

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victimized as well as victimizing characters; and yet the effect, with all its continuing vibrations of meaning, has been achieved by nothing but a simple juxtaposition of a moment of the salesman's life with a pattern of simple, almost primitive love. There is no sound of whining here. It may be that this salesman too would have enjoyed working with his hands, but he is incapable of it; when his car rolls into a ditch another man has to haul it out for him, and he goes to his death in a dumb despair at the thought of that other man's life.

As against as strong and unpretentious a piece as this, Mr. Miller's use of his material seems even more unpleasantly pompous, and above all, flat. It can hardly have occurred to anyone to use such a word as, for instance, suggestiveness in connection with it. Everything is stated, two or three times over, all with a great air of something like poetry about it but actually with no remove, no moment of departure from the literal whatever; through scene after snappy scene the action ploughs along on a level of naturalism that has not even the virtue of being natural. A jumble of styles is maintained, with borrowings from the movies, the ballet and the Greeks, and at moments of particular significance the colloquial but unimagized language of the play becomes a trifle more genteel—"I search, and I search, and I search, and I can't understand," Willy's wife says after his suicide, though she has been foreseeing it and explaining it from the beginning of the play. But such tricks, however skillfully worked, are no substitute for real impact, and can only momentarily hide the fact that this is a very dull business, which departs in no way that is to its credit from the general mediocrity of our commercial theater.

A simpler example of the norm, and of the weird inflation and distortion of values that goes on around it, is Sidney Kingsley's *Detective Story*. Taken only in itself, apart from the lofty explanations in the press which are part of the trappings of the trade, this is considerably less distressing than *Death of a Salesman*. It is exactly the middle-brow, second-rate offering that one expects from Mr. Kingsley, with a touch of melodrama, a terrific rushing and swirling about of more or less stock characters, a good deal of street humor, two secondary plots to keep the main one from pulling thin, and no demands on the mind. The scene is a New York police station, and the leading character, capably played by Ralph Bellamy, is a sadistic principle-ridden detective named McLeod, who in a certain criminal matter that turns out to involve his wife, takes the law into his hands and ends up being shot for it. The usual smattering of popular psychoanalysis appears—the detective, it

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seems, had a father complex—but this is not worth troubling about, any more than the pinch of Catholic ritual in the finale. The play calls for the same kind of intellectual scrutiny as would a Hollywood movie on the same subject, no more, and in fact McLeod comes from the movies; he has been seen quite often before, usually as a Nazi officer. Some of the people around him could as well be in a movie too, and are really very nice, especially the shop-lifter played by Lee Grant and the two professional burglars. In these characters at least there is an authenticity of a kind that appears rarely in *Death of a Salesman,* and the general romping around the stage is well handled.

It is the more the pity, therefore, that Mr. Kingsley should have felt obliged to take to the rostrum and attribute to himself the most extraordinary socio-political intentions, none of which are to be detected in the play. It is a pity because it falsifies the play in question, which has after all its own tough little graces, and the more so because it is symptomatic of the ugly confusion that more and more is keeping literary talent out of the theater, and that permits such a show as *Death of a Salesman* to be hailed as the genuine article—genuine play-wrighting, that is, not genuine Broadway. Both of these plays qualify very well for that.

Eleanor Clark

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ART CHRONICLE

THE NEW SCULPTURE

Art and literature seem usually to seek their frames of reference wherever the social mind or sensibility of the given historical moment finds its surest truth. In the Middle Ages this area of certainty, or rather of plausibility, coincided with religion, in the Renaissance and for some time thereafter with abstract reason. The nineteenth century shifted the area of plausibility to factual, empirical reality, a notion that has undergone considerable change during the last hundred years and always in the direction of a narrower conception of what constitutes an indisputable fact of experience. Our sensibility has shifted similarly, demanding of aesthetic experience an increasingly literal order of effects and becoming more and more reluctant to admit illusion and fiction. Thus it is not only our society's highly developed division of labor that has suggested the greater specialization of the separate arts; it is also our taste for the actual, immediate, first-hand, which desires that painting, sculpture, music, poetry become more concrete by confining themselves strictly to that which is most palpable in them, namely their mediums, and by refraining from treating or imitating what lies outside the province of their exclusive effects. This does not mean what Lessing meant when he protested against the confusion of the arts; Lessing still thought of the arts as imitative of an external reality which was to be incorporated by means of illusion; but modern sensibility asks for the exclusion of all reality external to the medium of the respective art—for the exclusion, that is, of subject matter. Only by reducing themselves to the means by which they attain virtuality as art, to the literal essence of their mediums, and only by avoiding as much as possible explicit reference to any form of experience not given immediately through their mediums, can the arts communicate that sense of concretely felt, irreducible experience in which our sensibility finds its fundamental certainty.

This is the complex of factors—by no means stated completely—that I believe responsible for, among other things, such phenomena as

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"pure" poetry, the "pure" novel, and "pure" or abstract painting and sculpture. Notice, for instance, how emphatically such writers as Mallarmé, Valéry, Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Cummings, Dylan Thomas, Stefan George, and Hart Crane call attention to their medium, which does not disguise or render itself transparent in order to grant us the quickest possible access to their content or subject matter, but becomes itself a large part of the subject matter. I could illustrate this tendency at length in modern literature, but literature is not what I am interested in dealing with here.

However, we should remember that no attempt at a "pure" work of art has ever succeeded in being more than an approximation—least of all in literature, which uses words that signify other things than themselves. The tendency toward "purity" or absolute abstractness exists only as a tendency, an aim, not as a realization. But as a tendency it is sufficient to explain much in the present state, not only of literature, but also of the visual arts, which are driven toward the same sort of insistence on the palpability of their mediums that we see in Mallarmé, Joyce, and Gertrude Stein.

The literal nature of the medium of painting consists in configurations of pigment on a flat surface, just as the essential medium of poetry consists in rhythmic configurations of words arranged according to the rules of a language. Modern painting conforms to our desire for that which is positive and literal by openly declaring itself to be what painting has always been but has for long tried to dissemble: colors placed on a two-dimensional surface. The illusion of the third dimension is renounced, and likewise the fiction of representation, which belongs to the literal part of painting as little as it does to that of music; to transpose the image of a three-dimensional object to a flat surface, even if only schematically, is considered by such a modern painter as the late Mondrian to be a denial and violation of the nature of the medium. Modern sensibility tends to consider it a deception, and therefore shallow, un-moving, without concreteness.

Mondrian has shown that it is still possible to paint authentic easel pictures while conforming to this strict—and more than strict— notion of painting. Nevertheless one begins to see a danger in it for the art of painting as we have known it. Pictorial art of this sort comes very close to decoration. Mondrian's greatness may be said to consist in good measure in having so successfully incorporated the virtues of decoration in easel painting, but this is small guarantee for the future. Painting of a kind that identifies itself exclusively with its surface cannot help developing toward decoration and suffering a certain narrowing of its

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range of expression. It may compensate for this by a greater intensity and concreteness—contemporary abstract art has done so with signal success—but a loss is still felt in so far as the unity and dynamics of the easel picture are weakened, as they must be by any absolutely flat painting. The fact is, I fear, that easel painting in the literally two-dimensional mode that our age, with its positiveness, forces upon it may soon be unable to say enough about what we feel to satisfy us quite, and that we shall no longer be able to rely upon painting as largely as we used to for a visual ordering of our experience.

I do not mean to suggest that painting will soon decline as an art; it is not essential to the point I wish to make to claim that. What is to be pointed out is that painting's place as the supreme visual art is now threatened, whether it is in decline or not. And I want also to call attention to sculpture, an art that has been in relative desuetude for several centuries but which has lately undergone a transformation that seems to endow it with a greater range of expression for modern sensibility than painting now has. This transformation, or revolution, is a product of Cubism.

Between the Renaissance and Rodin sculpture suffered as a vehicle of expression because of its adherence to the monolithic, somatic Graeco-Roman tradition of carving and modelling. The ideal subject of this tradition was the human torso and head, and it rejected as inappropriate all that was inanimate and immobile. An art confined to the monolith could say very little for the post-Renaissance man, and painting was therefore able to monopolize subject matter, imagination, and talent in the visual arts, where almost everything that happened between Michelangelo and Rodin happened on canvas. That sculpture was at a lesser remove than any of the other arts from that which it imitated—from its subject matter—and that it required less powers of abstraction to transpose the image, say, of an animal to stone in the round than to a flat surface, or into words—this also counted against it for several centuries. Sculpture was too *literal* a medium.

Rodin was the first sculptor who tried actually to catch up with painting, dissolving stone forms into light and air in search of effects analogous to those of Impressionist painting. He was a great artist but he destroyed his tradition and left only ambiguities behind him. Maillol and Lehmbruck were also great sculptors, and it was Rodin perhaps who made them possible, but the first got his inspiration from archaeology and the second from expressionist painting. They mark an end, and their art cleared the way for something radically new to fill

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the vacuum left by the extinction of the Graeco-Roman-Renaissance tradition.

Meanwhile Cubism had appeared in painting. Brancusi, under its indirect influence and the more direct one of Negro sculpture, was able to begin the transition from the monolith to a new kind of sculpture derived from modern painting and the wood-carvings of Africa and Oceania: a kind of sculpture entirely new to European civilization, sculpture as drawing in space, as the enclosure of space, and as an art no longer restricted to the solid mass and to human and animal forms. Brancusi himself does not complete the transition. What he does, at least in his work in stone and metal, is push the monolith to such an extreme, reduce it to such archetypal simplicity, that it is exhausted more or less as a principle of form. The new sculpture really begins with Braque's and Picasso's Cubist collages, springing up out of a mode of painting that thrusts forms outward from the picture plane instead of drawing them back into the recessions of illusionary space.* Thence the new sculpture grew through the bas-relief constructions that Picasso and then Arp and Schwitters created by raising the collage above the picture plane; and from there Picasso, a magnificent sculptor as well as painter, along with the Russian Constructivists Tatlin, Pevsner, and Gabo, and also Archipenko, Duchamp-Villon, Lipschitz, Laurens and then Giacometti, at last delivered it into the positive truth of free space, altogether away from the picture plane.

This new, pictorial, draughtsman's sculpture has more or less abandoned the traditional materials of stone and bronze in favor of ones more flexible under such modern tools as the oxyacetylene torch: steel, iron, alloys, glass, plastics. It has no regard for the unity of its physical medium and will use any number of different materials in the same work and any variety of applied colors—as befits an art that sees in its products almost as much that is pictorial as is sculptural. The sculptor-constructor is, if anything, more drawn to ideas conceived by analogy with landscape than to those derived from single objects.

The new sculpture is also freed, as should be self-evident from what I have said, from the requirements of imitative representation. And it is here precisely that its advantage over modern painting, as far as range of expression is concerned, lies. The same evolution in sensibility that denied to painting the illusion of depth and of representation made

* There is a curious historical symmetry here. Our Western, naturalistic painting had its own origins in the sculpture of the 12th and 13th Centuries, which was 200 years ahead of painting in point of capacity for imitating nature, and which continued to dominate the other arts until the late 15th Century.

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itself felt in sculpture by tending to deny it the monolith, which in three-dimensional art has too many connotations of representation. Released from mass and solidity, sculpture finds a much larger world before it, and itself in the position to say all that painting can no longer say. The same process that has impoverished painting has enriched sculpture. Sculpture has always been able to create objects that seem to have a denser, more literal reality than those created by painting; this, which used to be its handicap, now constitutes its greater appeal to our newfangled, positivist sensibility, and this also gives it its greater license. It is now free to invent an infinity of new objects and disposes of a potential wealth of forms with which our taste cannot quarrel in principle, since they will all have their self-evident physical reality, as palpable and independent and present as the houses we live in and the furniture we use. Originally the most transparent of all the arts because the closest to the physical nature of its subject matter, sculpture now enjoys the benefit of being the art to which the least connotation of fiction or illusion is attached.

The new sculpture has still another particular advantage. To painting, no matter how abstract and flat, there still clings something of the past simply because it is painting and painting has such a rich and recent past. This until a short time ago was an asset, but I am afraid that it has begun to shrink. The new sculpture has almost no historical associations whatsoever—at least not with our own civilization's past—which endows it with a virginality that compels the artist's boldness and invites him to tell everything without fear of censorship by tradition.* All he need remember of the past is Cubist painting, all he need avoid is naturalism.

All this, I believe, explains why the number of promising young sculptors in this country is so much greater, proportionally, than is that of promising young painters. Of the latter we have four or five who may figure eventually in the history of the art of our times. But we have as many as nine or ten young sculptor-constructors who have a chance, as things look, to contribute something ambitious, serious and original: David Smith, Theodore Roszak, David Hare, Herbert Ferber, Seymour Lipton, Richard Lippold, Peter Grippe, Burgoyne Diller, Adaline Kent,

* One of the ways in which the new sculpture's advantage over painting is revealed is by our feeling that what we see in the pictures of such painters as Matta, Lam, and sometimes Sutherland—all three of whom owe so much to Picasso—and in a good deal of Picasso's own work, is illegitimate sculpture, illustrations of sculpture or of ideas essentially sculptural. But we never feel that the new sculpture is illegitimate painting. It is too fresh, just as Mantegna's painting which owed so much to the other art, was too fresh to be called illegitimate sculpture.

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Ibram Lassaw, Noguchi—and still others. Not all these artists are richly gifted and not all of them have broken away from the monolith; their styles are as various as the variety of sculpture since 1905. But unequal as they are in talent, they all show freshness, inventiveness, and positive taste, qualities they owe, I feel, to the fact that their medium is so new and so cogent that it produces interesting work almost automatically, just as the new naturalistic painting of the fifteenth century in Italy and Flanders extracted masterpieces from even mediocre hands. The same seems to be the case, from what I can gather, with the new sculpture in Paris and London.

As yet not enough attention has been paid to the novelty of the new sculpture. But not enough attention is paid to sculpture in general. For most of us, raised as we are to look only at painting, a piece of sculpture fades too quickly into an indifferent background as a matter-of-fact ornamental object. The new sculpture-construction has to contend with this habit of vision, and it is for this reason, I think, that so few attempts have been made to evaluate it seriously and relate it to the rest of art and to the feeling of our time. Yet this new "genre" is perhaps the most important manifestation of the visual arts since Cubist painting, and is at this moment pregnant with more excitement than any other art except music.

Clement Greenberg

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MUSIC CHRONICLE

BELA BARTOK

When the Hungarian composer Bela Bartok died in New York, September 1945, few even of his most ardent admirers would have expected the rapid turnabout of reputation that has brought his music during the succeeding three years to the forefront of attention. As indicated by recent musical publications, musicologists and critics had for the most part lost interest in him. A few of his piano pieces turned up in the repertoire, but his larger works were consistently ignored. Bartok died in poverty, his hospital bills and funeral expenses paid by ASCAP, a charity this great organization has had to extend to few of its other important members. Several of his friends had tried to seek out ways of helping Bartok: to offer him assistance was to risk permanently losing his friendship. He would accept help only in the form of commissions to do work, and the amount of work a man dying of leukemia can take on is limited. Yet the three major compositions he completed during these last years may be ranked with the masterpieces of twentieth century music. These are the Concerto for Orchestra, commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation for the Boston Symphony, the Suite for Unaccompanied Violin, commissioned by Yehudi Menuhin, and the Third Piano Concerto, written for his wife. He was also working on a university project, transcribing American folk music from recordings. At the time of his death Boosey & Hawkes was beginning to reissue the earlier European publications. A few scattered recordings of his music were available, but it was impossible for an interested listener to hear under any circumstances more than a fragmentary portion of his works.

Shortly after his death the Philadelphia Symphony broadcast in two successive weeks the Violin Concerto, played by Menuhin, and the Third Piano Concerto, played by Gyorgy Sandor. On the intervening Sunday the New York Philharmonic Symphony broadcast the Concerto for Orchestra. Writing at that time, I remarked that that week would be a turning point in the history of contemporary music.

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During the remainder of that season Evenings on the Roof in Los Angeles, where Bartok has been frequently performed, and the League of Composers in New York, presented programs of Bartok's chamber music. Recordings of the Violin Concerto and the Third Piano Concerto appeared. His published music began to be in demand. By the end of another year publishers and recording companies were hurrying to keep up. Since Mozart, no major composer has come so quickly into general recognition and acceptance solely as a result of the interest in his music stirred up by the accident of his death.

Today it is possible to obtain recordings of the six string quartets, the Second Sonata for Violin and Piano, a fairly representative quantity of his piano music, though the Piano Sonata is still unavailable, and the three great final concertos. Orchestras generally have lost their fear of programming an occasional Bartok work and are being rewarded by a gratifying audience response. After hearing the Violin Concerto played by Tossy Spivakovsky with the San Francisco Symphony last season, one of our most competent national critics, Alfred Frankenstein, wrote, as I myself did several years ago after hearing the first broadcast performance, that this concerto must be ranked the equal of those by Beethoven and Brahms. Last January NBC devoted two hours of national network time to Bartok music: the Music for Strings, Percussion, Celesta, and Piano, played by the NBC Symphony under Ansermet, and the one-act opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, played by the Dallas Symphony with vocal soloists directed by Dorati. It was Dorati also who conducted the splendid recording, with Menuhin, of the Violin Concerto. As a result of so many performances it is now possible for the interested amateur to attempt an over-all appraisal of Bartok's lifetime achievement.

The European composers of Bartok's generation learned the German tradition from Wagner, Schumann, and Brahms. They were influenced as much by Liszt as by Beethoven. Among contemporary composers they favored Strauss and studied the coloristic methods of Debussy and Rimsky-Korsakov. To disregard such stylistic influences is as unwise as to exaggerate them. No creative artist, not even Mozart, ever began *ab ovo*. The early growth of an effective style consists in making variations upon an inimitable model. In Bartok's work the significant factor was the influence of Liszt. The example of Liszt offered a way out of the dead-end of Wagnerian romanticism. Under the conventional decorations of the B minor Piano Sonata Bartok found a granitic material, neither pretty nor romantic.

At the same time Bartok reacted against the gipsy rhapsodies of Liszt and Brahms, falsely called Hungarian. In search of the real music

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of his people, who although Asiatic in origin are not gipsies, Bartok went into the Magyar back-country and among the neighboring Slav peoples to compile a collection of recorded and transcribed folk melodies, many of them several hundred years old. These melodies, like those which Falla found among the Spanish peasants, are not harmonized according to modern classic-romantic conventions; they are intervallic in structure, as rugged in their intervals as the sounds of the instruments, such as bagpipe and cembalom, on which in isolated villages they were still being played. Around these melodies, their non-diatonic, often dissonant intervals, and the sounds of the instruments native to them Bartok composed the large body of his early compositions, notably the many sets of small piano pieces. Through all his piano writing, except the études that show the influence of Liszt's most impersonal style, the sounds of cembalom and bagpipe are heard. Bartok edited several volumes of the works of Couperin, Scarlatti, and Bach, and transcribed in a heavy chordal manner, less flexible than that of Busoni, works by Rossi, Ciaia, and Purcell. This experience in baroque keyboard music helped him in adapting rugged folk melodies to a pianistic style.

During these earlier years Bartok produced many compositions which because of Stravinsky's more rapid rise to world-wide recognition have been attributed to his influence. The fact is that Bartok came to them first. The Fourth Bagatelle (*Ma mie qui danse*), written in 1908, anticipates the dry Waltz of Stravinsky's *Tale of a Soldier* (1918); the primitive power and percussive attack of Allegro Barbaro, woven around by fragmentary melodies, occur in the same year as *The Rites of Spring*. The tone-quality of the cembalom at a later time inspired Stravinsky also; he included the instrument in minor compositions and in one of the schemes for orchestrating *Les Noces* but came instead like Bartok to a percussive approximation, using four pianos. That either composer learned from the other is problematical; certainly the developing technique of Bartok drew less upon Stravinsky than upon Schoenberg.

Schoenberg's is an art of melody, fragmented and reconstituted, and in the process broken clear of diatonic harmony. Through the use of non-diatonic successions of intervals Bartok had come, like Debussy, to a point where he must find some other means of structural orientation. What would go by itself in the piano pieces needed a new vital means of organization to become large. Such a means was created by Schoenberg in the twelve-tone technic (or as he prefers to call it, "method of composing with twelve tones").

Bartok did not come easily to the twelve-tone technic and never fully submitted to its exclusive principles. The early one-act opera *Blue-*

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beard's Castle in its melodic distortions reminds the listener of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire,* but the whole sound effect is nearer Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande.* For a long time, until after 1930, Bartok remained independent, relying upon enlarged folk-music forms and the intensive development of his earlier frictive-percussive technique to produce such major compositions as the two Violin Sonatas, the Piano Sonata (much influenced by Liszt), two of the three Piano Concertos, and the first four of the String Quartets.

Though his style from beginning to end varied less than that of any other major twentieth-century composer except Erik Satie, until this time it was plainly stronger as a whole in its texture than in its form. Contributing to this texture was a taste for heavily percussive, dissonant chords, moving in rhythmic blocks, occasionally arpeggiated or ornamented by fantastic acciaccaturi, melodically independent and dynamically directed by displacement of a semitone or by structural alteration within the chord. Typical of Bartok's extreme integrity and lack of false creative pride is the letter he wrote to Henry Cowell asking permission to borrow that composer's new technic of tone-clusters. Needless to say, the permission was graciously granted. The technic was first fully used by Bartok in the Piano Sonata.

Around the central chordal body the lighter obbligato melodies, ceaselessly fragmented and recombining in new rhythmic patterns, go their individual ways. The lack of a fully organized melodic polyphony was compensated for, as in Stravinsky's music, by heightening the rhythmic interest. The rhythmic texture, more deeply piled than in any other twentieth century music, is set off by the very careful coloring and linear displacement of individual tones. Like a weaver of fine rugs Bartok intensifies the color refinement of his sound by sharply contoured, angular rhythmic and melodic outlines. His most original compositions, as Joseph Szigeti testifies, are intricately worked mosaics of fragmented folk-themes. Bartok, unlike many of his contemporaries, never disclaimed his use of authentic folk material. He did not need to protest he was original. His power was not in the material itself but in his use of it. Like Debussy he relies upon the heard tone, the sound-shape of tones within the chord, avoiding the structural rigor which makes Hindemith's art academically more plausible but less audibly real. The inimitable beauty of Bartok's music, freed of any false formalism in his smaller pieces, does not thrust itself upon the ear but reticently emerges from his larger compositions as whole texture.

From the early Bagatelles to the final Piano Concerto the art of Bartok requires of the performer virtuoso assurance, flexibility, and

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strength, as well as bravura tone-production reaching to the most extreme qualities of the instrument. His music does not allow a generalized tone, the vibrato-legato of romantic virtuosity. The sound of each composition, like its rhythm, insists upon a precise definition, the piano frictive or percussive, the violin or wind tone pointed and exact. Even in the many little piano pieces *For Children,* the collection of forty-four Duos for two violins, and the beginning books of *Mikrokosmos* there are no concessions to easy, careless playing, habitual finger-patterns, tonal laxity, rhythmic carelessness.

Bartok had been for many years a piano pedagogue at the Royal Conservatory in Budapest and a widely admired pianist of very individual quality. His interest in the many technical problems and the possibilities of his instrument never flagged. During the 1930's he summarized his knowledge of folk music and his art of writing for the piano in a series of one hundred and fifty-six progressive piano pieces, intended for the student. This collection, called *Mikrokosmos,* to show that it includes his art in microcosm, stands with the *Orders* by Couperin and the *Well-Tempered Clavier* by Bach as a landmark of keyboard writing. Like the keyboard music by Couperin and Bach it is written to be read rather than memorized, and it is full of traps for the careless or indifferent reader.

During these years also Bartok finally accepted for his own use in his own manner the general plan of the twelve-tone technic. His first great formal accomplishment in the use of this technic is the Music for Strings, Percussion, Celesta, and Piano, beginning with a fugal movement of extraordinary dark beauty, the first of many whole or partial fugues that distinguish the consistently polyphonic organization of his final works. In the darkness of this music may be discerned the nature of the composer's attitude, the theme of unrelenting darkness that pervades *Bluebeard's Castle.* Bartok was now at the crest of his art. From this time until his death he produced a series of major compositions that as a whole possibly surpass the best music by other composers of our century. In addition to the three last Concertos, these are the Violin Concerto, the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, the Fifth and Sixth Quartets, Contrasts for violin, clarinet, and piano, and the ethereal Suite for Unaccompanied Violin.

Bartok's compositions after the early Rhapsody for piano and orchestra and the symphonic poem *Kossuth* are with few exceptions soloistic or concertante in style, combining as Mozart did a baroque sense of offsetting linear textures with a classic-romantic structure of dynamic contrasts. What had been given up in repetitive melodic con-

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tinuity had been replaced by a more closely interwoven, a more multifarious internal interest. To the casual listener there is a sameness in externals, a recurrence of seemingly typical patterns, a spasmodic rising and disappearance of melodies and themes, in Bartok as in Mozart; what is not typical seems the more obscure. These external mannerisms do not hide from the more intent listener the constant recurrence of astonishing, delightful, uniquely memorable, and often deeply moving events.

In the works of his last years the acceptance of the twelve-tone technic as a central principle of development added to these great artistic powers a new organic integration, a final maturity of the whole art. Bartok's use of the tone-row differs from that of Schoenberg and occasionally rebels against it. Like Berg in the Violin Concerto he mingles types of harmonies in various ranges of dissonance and, like Stravinsky, binds the whole together by an organization of successive tonal centers. These tonal relationships are clarified by recurring varied scale-figures, as in Mozart and the later Busoni. A similar more melodious extension of the twelve-tone process is also evident in recent works by Schoenberg and by such other exponents as Adolph Weiss.

The later works of both Schoenberg and Bartok show increasingly the influence of Brahms and his proto-classical devices, as well as many technics drawn from the ornamental practices of instrumental music since the seventeenth century. This eclectic fructifying of a style already fully formed, mature, and self-sustaining occurred in the same way in the later music of Bach, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven.

The art of Schoenberg is dialectical, concerned with the various presentations and expressively tactical variations of the main theme, the particular tone-row of the composition. To this is added a corolla of ornamental variants, by which the abstract working out is given an affective, emotionally directive application. Schoenberg's later music is essentially a sound-structure dimensionally elaborated in heard space.

The art of Bartok is more directly expressive of its musical subject, the melodic theme or tone-row variant which provides its organic spine. To this is added a variety of contrasting subjects, often related to but not necessarily derived from the tone-row, which combine in lyrical or dramatic groupings. It is essentially a sound-texture heard in progressive rhythmic overlays.

These two styles, more nearly akin in reality than they seem to us in uninstructed hearing, with that of Stravinsky, which always suggests the stage, comprise the mainstream of abstract contemporary music as it enters the second half of the twentieth century.

Peter Yates

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THE LIBERAL MIND: TWO COMMUNICATIONS AND A REPLY

LIBERALISM AND LITERATURE

If we take the word "liberalism" literally, it suggests two things: a belief in freedom and a copiousness and openness of mind and sentiment. For us, human beings involved in history, these two basic ideas cannot for long be considered apart from the instrumentality of Enlightenment doctrine. The practical instruments of modern liberalism are democratic, libertarian politics and the doctrine that the human reason, in its secular function, is capable of establishing the social conditions of freedom. I take this to be fundamental truth for our time, and think that no declared liberal can be taken seriously who does not base his liberalism upon this truth.

These thoughts are aroused by the remarks on my opinions in recent issues of the PARTISAN REVIEW by Messrs. Arvin, Davis, Aaron, Barrett, and Howe—remarks which, though ranging individually from the careless to the incisive, seem to me on the whole very valuable. I venture to think that the five critics will find my preliminary definition of liberalism tentatively acceptable. If they feel that I am preaching to them no more than exactly what they are preaching to me, that will indicate the extent to which the controversy has issued from easily reparable misunderstandings.

But the controversy is real, and ought to be continued in whatever clear language the contestants can muster. To begin with, there is a disagreement about the scope of the word "liberalism." The five critics wish to restrict the meaning of the word to a particular kind of rationalism and a particular kind of politics. I wish to make of liberalism a somewhat broader and more octopus-like ideal and to emphasize its qualities of copiousness and openness of mind and sentiment. And I do not regard this desire for latitude and exploration as a stratagem, conscious or unconscious, for establishing relationships with reaction or religious obscurantism.

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In the dim hinterlands of the mind of that particular kind of liberal I have sometimes been concerned to attack, there dwell a number of monsters in the reality of which this liberal does not believe, though they exist in his own mind and excite his own emotions. Two of these monsters are religion and literature. The liberal who regards religion as no more than the befuddled dream of theologians and anchorites and literature as no more than the harmless play of the pleasure-principle is dealing himself a prodigious injury. For if it be said that religion and literature may be very fine and beautiful but that they have no relation to politics or reason, a deeply schismed and Janus-like vision of things is being advocated. Mr. Barrett's Janus-like vision invokes, though it does not guarantee, an indispensable philosophic clarity and political intransigence. And in so far, one cherishes his vision. But no one should mistake Mr. Barrett's bifocal ideology for a complete view of life and letters. It is well to try to reason clearly, but it is not well to cleave oneself asunder in the attempt. The fate of liberalism, so far as any of us can control it, will depend on the flexibility and resourcefulness and self-criticism of the mind which is based on, but not imprisoned within, the special doctrines of liberalism, Enlightenment doctrines. The historians know that when human culture reduces itself to the image of its instrumentality, it prepares itself for suicide. One of the functions of literature is to preserve culture from its own reductions—reductions of cogency, power, majesty, and humor—and one of the functions of literary criticism is to help literature do this.

If it be replied that the Enlightenment is not an instrumentality but the fountain of ultimate truth, I can only say that it looks to me a good deal less ravishing than that. The Enlightenment is not ultimate; it must be defined partly by reference not merely to the Renaissance but also to the other periods of Western culture. The Enlightenment is not equivalent to the nineteenth century, as Mr. Barrett seems to say. That is to neglect the fact that some of the best thought of the nineteenth century was devoted to a respectful reassessment of the Enlightenment. The most useful ideas live in history by a sinuous adaptation, by capitulation and attack, as well as by intransigence.

Perhaps these general remarks may benefit by more particular ones. The five critics seem to agree that I myopically swim in a vague and non-historical medium—or "jelly," as Mr. Barrett says—confusing life with literature and denying history because, for example, I think it possibly advisable to speak of Iago in relation to liberalism. Mr. Barrett correctly states that Iago is a character in a play written before liberalism, as we know it, was ever heard of. All I wish to hold out

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for is that Iago is a classic study of certain kinds of behavior which on the whole liberalism has been unable to face or understand. My suggestion is that our liberal thought might benefit by being tested against the evidence offered to us by the spectacle of Iago, as Swift tested the theories of the Laputians against the spectacle of the prime minister's wife who chose to leave Laputa and live on earth with a deformed and ragged footman who beat her. Mr. Barrett supposes that the character of Iago has no reference to anything outside the pages of Shakespeare's play, an idea from which even Cleanth Brooks, for all his concern with "the text," might well draw back. Sharing Mr. Barrett's recently enunciated desire for a "productive" or "programmatic" literary criticism, as opposed to an autotelic or Alexandrian criticism, I am yet at a loss to see how such a criticism is possible once you have severed as many cultural arteries as he severs.

Again, one of the critics writes that in my essay on *Billy Budd,* I present Claggart as "a personification of the liberal." I wrote that "Claggart is another version of Melville's self-righteous Liberal, the Confidence Man." Since I regard myself as a liberal, I naturally do not think all liberals are self-righteous. But some are, and Melville's confidence man, whatever else he may also be, is one of them. I do not equate Claggart with the confidence man: he is "another version"—a further turn upon the archetype.The connection between Claggart and the confidence man, so far as I make it, can be well supported by textual citation, as I have shown elsewhere. Versions of the confidence man appear in several of Melville's books, including *Israel Potter* and *Clarel*: one is the master-at-arms, Claggart; another is Bland, the master-at-arms of *White Jacket,* a smooth-talking swindler with a remarkable array of masks and guiseful personalities. I do not think, then, that my interpretation is a "violent wrenching" of Melville's text, or that, having somewhat examined the literary structure of *Billy Budd,* I was indulging in unwarranted moral preachments when I suggested that Claggart resembles a modern type, the fake liberal and Pharisee who delivers the "common man" over to the man of power, or when I suggested that our understanding of this type might be enhanced by reading Melville.

In speaking of Claggart as I did at the end of my essay, I was trying to seek out those areas wherein life and literature mingle and vitalize each other. Mr. Barrett, strangely taking up the very critical doctrine which the New Criticism already begins to outgrow, denies that there are any such areas, preferring to imagine instead an unpassable abyss. Indeed Mr. Barrett's ideal intellectual leads an amazingly schizophrenic life: he admires both Sidney Hook and Kafka, but he identifies Hook

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with reality—*real* reality—intelligence, and moral responsibility, and denies that any of these qualities may be found in Kafka, or if they are found in Kafka, that they have any bearing upon human thought or conduct. In what, exactly, does literary criticism consist? For example, no criticism would be possible, given Mr. Barrett's preliminary implication that literature contains no "facts about ourselves and our world"—for that matter, no literature would be possible. Or if he means to equate literature with "the desires of the imagination to participate completely in . . . 'the great images of man,' " some clarification of this troublesome phrase is needed. Literature is not a desire; it is a structured means of expression which the critic should examine, not failing to explore the moral and cultural relevance of what is expressed and to place the work in historical context. Mr. Barrett, by appearing to say that what we do with literature is "appreciate" it, would seem to be aligning himself with the motley legatees of nineteenth-century aestheticism, a somewhat defunct and useless opinion. One does not ask Mr. Barrett to stop *enjoying* literature by pointing out that the subject of discussion is criticism.

I apprehend Mr. Barrett's negative point very well. There *is* a danger in using literature as the language of one's own unwarranted moralizing: Lewis Mumford is not the ideal critic. But surely it is possible to avoid this error without denying the moral and cultural quality of literature.

Certainly we must remain committed to the Enlightenment, but with such a copious and open spirit of criticism that the commitment is not destroyed by our clinging to our own weaknesses—or to those of the Enlightenment. Somewhere behind Mr. Barrett's words I hear the voice of Voltaire, thin and rancorous on this occasion, fulminating against the myths and fables and declaring that only blockheads take them seriously. And does one not sense that another dispensable Enlightenment idea is being unwittingly invoked, an idea of perfectibility, a hope that if liberalism is kept pure by being freed of the artificialities and corruptions of culture, it will prosper out of its own inner virtue?

Finally, I am not so sure that the time has come to call a halt to the critical reassessment of liberalism. The job is not finished when one has disposed of Henry Wallace and *The New Republic*. Questions of intellectual economy, public strategy, and the danger that liberalism may be all but dead anyway are terribly real. But if we are already at such a pass, there is not much hope whatever we do. We must assume, surely, that something is to be gained by open and responsible controversy. For my

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part, I welcome Mr. Barrett's suggestion that I step out of the wings and into the candid glare of the spotlight, only insisting that he do the same.

Richard Chase

A REJOINDER TO MR. BARRETT

In his *Variety* in the March issue, Mr. William Barrett refers in a very gracious manner to my critical effort of the last decade and he characterizes its intention in a way that I should be happy to think is accurate. He then goes on to say, in reference to my strictures on the liberal mind, that he is puzzled about "the precise limits" at which my criticism might halt in its objections to the culture of liberalism; and he puts certain questions which are not, I take it, wholly rhetorical.

Mr. Barrett asks whether liberalism is not properly to be defined by its naturalistic and pragmatic beliefs rather than by a particular political, and presumably cultural, content. And he asks: "If the fundamental attitudes of liberalism are the objects of our criticism, ought we not to push our inquiry to its historical source and question the values of the Enlightenment itself?"

It is to be observed of Mr. Barrett's questions that they are, considered in their polemical intent, *forcing* questions. I conceive that they are intended to force Mr. Richard Chase and myself, or any critic of liberalism, to the wall of—let us for brevity be blunt about it—religion.

In sum Mr. Barrett is saying to Mr. Chase and me something like this: "Very well then—you have this habit of raising all sorts of objections to liberalism. I will give you a chance to say that you mean Stalinism and not liberalism at all. But if you don't say that, then you must admit that when you attack liberalism as it now exists, you are really attacking naturalism, pragmatism and the values of the Enlightenment, and then the only frank and logical course open to you is to admit further that you want dogmatism and supernaturalism—that, in short, you are ripe to declare for religion."

Mr. Chase will of course speak for himself, but I expect that he will join me in rejecting Mr. Barrett's alternatives. My own reason for rejecting them is not that I regard the religious alternative with horror. My conception of the nature of our life is of a kind which prevents me from supposing that the person who elects religion is, by that, neurotic or ill-willed or intellectually discredited. I should add, for one can easily

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be misunderstood in these matters, that I myself am not drawn toward making this election. I reject Mr. Barrett's alternatives simply because they are not real and legitimate alternatives.

By his questions Mr. Barrett seems to require that liberalism be detached from its immediate and "existential" nature and that it be dealt with only in its ideal "essential" nature as Mr. Barrett defines it. He lays it down as a condition that if one is to attack liberalism one must in honesty attack liberalism's assumptions of pragmatism and naturalism; and he seems to imply that the critic of liberalism who dares go back to deal with the values of the Enlightenment is in danger at least of refutation and probably of something worse, of exposing himself as religious and reactionary.

As to pushing our inquiry as far back as it will go, although I would add the proviso that we must be careful not to confuse with its source the present issue we inquire into, I agree with Mr. Barrett that something is to be gained by a historical reprise. And I myself habitually keep the Enlightenment in my thought and reading, having been led to do so a good many years ago by the necessities of dealing with Matthew Arnold's situation. I don't say this with any pride in my special historical vision, for I conceive that the whole of modern literature has been an inquiry into the values of the Enlightenment. The inquiry began with Rousseau; indeed, if Montaigne has any part in the liberal tradition—and whose part is finer?—then the inquiry began with Pascal's attack on Montaigne. In ways too numerous to mention here in detail, the inquiry has continued up to the present, and the contemporary literature which by common consent is of the greatest stature follows in the line of Blake, Burke and Wordsworth.

Which is to suggest that the movement the textbooks call the Enlightenment is too simple and unitary a segment of history to serve Mr. Barrett's purpose of inquiry. The Enlightenment is but one element of a dialectical situation of which the opposing and complementary element is Romanticism. John Stuart Mill's essays on Coleridge and Bentham are a classic statement of the nature of this dialectic, and Freud's work may be understood as a present example of a possible synthesis of the two elements. I can perhaps suggest to Mr. Barrett at least the approximate limits of my criticism of liberalism if I say that it has been guided by my sense that contemporary liberalism seems incapable of responding to the realistic values of Romanticism which, equally with the idealistic values of the Enlightenment, are properly part of its heritage.

As for Mr. Barrett's attempt to control the inquiry into liberalism

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by defining liberalism in a wholly ideal sense, that is quite inacceptable. Mr. Barrett wonders whether, when I say harsh things about liberalism I don't really mean Stalinism. I do indeed mean to attack Stalinism, but I also mean to attack liberalism as it tends to corrupt itself by approaching Stalinism as a limit. I have no thought of attacking pragmatism, for I consider myself a pragmatist in the precise and conditioned sense in which William James defines the position on page 60 of *The Problems of Philosophy.* (Incidentally, pragmatism will not serve as a test of liberalism, nor is it necessarily the yokefellow of naturalism. It can also be the philosophical basis of conservatism and of religious belief. This can be seen from a careful reading of Newman or from T. S. Eliot's virtually explicit statement in his essay on Pascal.) And I have no intention of attacking naturalism, for I consider myself a committed naturalist insofar as I formulate views on such matters.

But I believe that liberalism has debased its whole intellectual heritage. It is precisely because I am myself a liberal, and a pragmatist and naturalist, that I am depressed by the obvious fact—I have so often pointed to it that it and I have become tiresome—that liberalism has not been able to produce a literature which can strongly engage our emotions, nor a body of thought which can win our happy assent.

This failure of liberalism in art and its concomitant failure in thought in general, in perceptive feeling in general, seems to me so obvious and dominating a condition of our lives that when Mr. Barrett, following the three gentlemen from Smith, unsheathes the flashing question, "Just what do you mean by liberalism?" I can't help suspecting a polemical maneuvre the motive and necessity of which quite puzzle me. Semantic precision is surely one of the simple virtues, but we've come to a sad pass of culture when, in the company for which we write, Mr. Chase and I aren't allowed to point to the open, staring secret of liberalism's inadequacies without placing our pious hands on our pure hearts to show that they're in the right—i.e. the left (or what's left of it) —place.

Again in the interest of semantic precision and liberal homiletics, Mr. Barrett asks why, if I criticize the liberal imagination as inadequate, I don't say "literal imagination" and be done with it.

I say "liberal imagination" exactly because I don't want to be done with it. I don't aspire to the impregnable position of Calvin Coolidge's preacher, who was against sin—my interest in literalness comes from my belief that the liberal imagination has literalness as one of its characteristics. And literalness of imagination becomes a matter of great concern to me when it marks a group, my group, that claims to have

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dealings with the political and social future, with, that is to say, the quality that life is to have.

This leads me to the accusation which Mr. Barrett directs at Mr. Chase and which he might as well have directed at me, that of mixing up life and literature.

There are, to be sure, certain situations in criticism, and no doubt in action, in which it is important to insist on the distinction between life and literature. But to maintain their perfect separation as a general principle is surely the prime error of—that I should ever use the word to Mr. Barrett!—academicism.

Mr. Barrett asks: " . . . Is a philosophy to be arrived at from life or from literature?" What a question! Mr. Barrett, who knows far more about philosophy than I do, has sat too long in the Enlightenment —his eyes dazzle, he has come to believe in *tabulae rasae* and if not in Noble Savages then at least in Illiterate Philosophers. The answer to his question is: why, from both life and literature, and inescapably, because literature is one of the cultural agents that form the attitudes, even the categories, by which at least some part of life is apprehended.

Since Mr. Barrett has done what it is always personally embarrassing to do, declared his conception of the relation of literature to life, I'll take heart and declare mine and say that I think that literature in its relation to life is polemical. On this occasion I'll risk leaving out all the necessary innumerable modifications of this statement—I'll let it stand that, after I've comprehended all the (quite dull) distinctions that are usually made between aesthetics and morality, I can't think of literature or any art without supposing that it has an axe to grind, that it is arguing or urging or bullying or tempting or seducing me into certain ways of being which have inevitable reference to ways of acting. That is, for me—and despite what he says I believe for Mr. Barrett too—a work of literature, or of any art, has ultimately a moral and even a political relevance.

If it be objected that this assimilation of art to life is exactly what Stalinist culture has done, I answer that it is not the assimilation that is in error but Stalinism's small view of life, its insufficient notion of art, its inadequate idea of what the connection is between life and art. And to this I would add the profound *ill-will* of Stalinism toward both life and art.

Feeling as I do, then, I'm not at all astonished at Mr. Chase's willingness to consider the question, whatever the answer, "Was Iago a 'progressive'?" (Mr. Barrett's counter-question of whether or not Desdemona bought her clothes at Bergdorff Goodman has, as a matter of

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fact, been settled by modern scholarship: she did not.) I do not take Mr. Chase to mean—I accept a momentary membership in the Literal Party which has been formed for the occasion by Mr. Barrett and the gentlemen from Smith—that Iago voted for Henry Wallace; I take him to mean that what he calls "the great images of man and his career on earth" have a continuing though fluctuating relevance, sometimes quite specific, sometimes only paradigmatic, to our present moral and thus to our present political situations. So far from agreeing with Mr. Barrett that this shows in Mr. Chase a lack of historical vision, I think that it is exactly what true historical vision suggests. It seems to me that the story of Oedipus means many things, among the most striking of which is the traditional view that it is the tragedy of the Inadequate Naturalist, the tragedy of the Man of the Enlightenment; and I should be glad at any time to discuss Othello as the Noble Fellow-Traveler Destroyed By Love of His Own Virtue.

Mr. Barrett questions the phrase, which I myself have used, *the moral imagination*. He wants to know precisely what morality this moral imagination imagines. And he wants to know why anyone who uses the phrase isn't content to say "psychological insight." My own intention for the phrase was that it should stand against what I detect as an assumption of liberal culture, that the life of man can be nicely settled by a correct social organization, or short of that, by the election of high moral attitudes. It was intended to mean, if I may quote myself, that the very election of morality constitutes a kind of moral danger, as does the correct social organization. Since I use the phrase chiefly in reference to literature, the proposed alternative, "psychological insight," would not serve me, partly because "insight" is less relevant to literature than "imagination" is, chiefly because in literature psychology is a quite secondary thing, sometimes no more than a sort of illusion, like "natural" dialogue, which satisfies our immediate temporal notion of the way things happen. In literature as well as in life the psychological is subsumed in the moral, and to try to make the smaller concept do the work of the larger is only to mask actuality.

One last point and I have done. Mr. Barrett in conclusion expresses gratitude to the critics of the liberal mind for having "demolished" certain "targets" which he exemplifies by *PM* and certain contributors to the liberal weeklies. He then goes on to speak of intellectual economy and asks, "How much energy is profitably expended in attacking the degradation of a doctrine? Is it really wise to take *The New Republic* as the residual legatee of the Enlightenment?"

If Mr. Barrett sees the quarrel with the liberal mind as having only

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this extent, then we who have carried on the quarrel are no doubt to blame. I, for one, am willing to take the fault to myself—a literary person is always likely to be a little provincial in argument and to deal with what is closest to his immediate literary interest. But whether or not I have been able to make it plain in my own work, the quarrel with the liberal mind directs itself beyond *PM* and *The New Republic*. I have in view the ideas of our powerful teachers' colleges, the assumptions of our social scientists, the theories of education that are now animating our colleges and universities, the notions of the new schools of psychoanalysis, the formulations of the professors of literature, particularly of American literature. Here are indeed the residuary legatees of the Enlightenment, and how eagerly they will tell you so, and how vehemently they will defend themselves from any question by pointing to the fine legality of the testament. This is the liberal culture that my own criticism has ultimately, if with insufficient explicitness, been directed against, although not, I would say, with quite the purpose of "demolishing" it. I only do not want to see it go its way unquestioned, unchecked and unmodified because I believe that, unless purged and enlightened by a critical effort of great seriousness, it will inevitably corrupt and betray itself into the very opposite of its avowed intention of liberation.

Lionel Trilling

ART, ARISTOCRACY, AND REASON

Mr. Trilling is so persuasive that for a moment he almost made me believe that I had really said the things he says I did. And the reader, who has less cause to remember accurately, may be even more confused at this point as to precisely who said precisely what, and before his confusion turns to apathy and boredom I think some review of the situation is called for to make clear again the main lines of the controversy.

The ball was started rolling by Mr. Chase in two pieces ("Dissent on Billy Budd," PR, November 1948; and "The Progressive Hawthorne," PR, January 1949) that had some harsh things to say about liberals and liberal attitudes. His excoriations of liberalism were not unfamiliar, but in the present case his rhetorical intensity was such that he gave many people the impression that he was pouring out the baby with the bath, that in his great and laudable zeal to correct certain errors of the lib-

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eral mind he was negating the values of liberalism altogether. Came, therefore, the protest from Smith College, by Messrs. Arvin, Davis, and Aaron (PR, February 1949), who were alarmed particularly by Mr. Chase's rather startling tendency to connect villainy with liberalism, and to see all the villains in the history of literature as liberals.

(All the noise and misunderstanding may thus have arisen merely from Mr. Chase's tone and emphasis, but I notice that in his reply above he still wants to think of Claggart, the villain of *Billy Budd,* as "a fake liberal." Now, there is no objection to this, but why should so much importance be attached to the point? And why could not Claggart equally well be a fake reactionary, conservative, communist, fascist, or Catholic? Which is to say, that human evil can crop up in the camp of any ideology.)

At that point I stepped into the controversy myself with the brief comment that Messrs. Chase and Trilling so vigorously belabor above, and at a length that suggests I had written an encyclopedic tome. My function, as I saw it, was to serve as something of a catalytic agent —to precipitate certain vapors into some more definite substance— rather than to inject any positive views of my own. I was interested in pushing the discussion (Mr. Trilling calls this asking "forcing" questions) beyond the matter of Melville into the more general issues that I saw in the background. Other people besides myself had wondered about the limits, the definite shape and outline, of Mr. Trilling's position, and the questions I raised were intended to provide an opportunity for sharpening those outlines. Mr. Trilling has met most of these questions very well, and though he seems impatient at having to repeat what he has often said elsewhere, it seems to me that the effect of gathering together points dispersed through his other writings is to produce a compact statement that makes his general position much clearer—so that I flatter myself that my "forcing" questions have accomplished some public service. But however this may be, the issue I tried to stick to throughout my questions to Mr. Trilling, and my criticisms of Mr. Chase, was their critique of liberalism, and not my own positive views (whatever they may be) on religion, philosophy, literary criticism, and the history of ideas during the past few centuries.

Now, in reply, both gentlemen surprise me by attempting to manoeuvre my brief comment into the center of the whole discussion. For this purpose, of course, they appear to find in my editorial an enormous number of things that they must surely know are not there. I have just counted through my piece very carefully, and find it contains exactly 1540 words, and in these 1540 words, Messrs. Chase and Trilling appear

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to find that I have expressed completely: (1) my attitude toward religion, (2) a theory of the relation of literature to life, (3) a definition of that complex historical entity, liberalism, (4) a theory as to the sources and initial data from which a philosophy is to be formed, (5) a thesis, in the history of ideas, about the precise nature of the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment, and the exact scope of the Enlightenment in our literary heritage. Really, gentlemen, you flatter my powers of conciseness too much!

Well, as we all know, polemic is inevitably the domain of distortion, and I should not like to add my own mite in the present case by bickering point by point with Messrs. Chase and Trilling; but there are one or two points I must rescue from confusion in order, as quickly as possible, to get myself out of the center of controversy, where I do not belong, and direct discussion toward what seem to me the important problems and issues. It is important to know what was and what was not the issue. The issue was not, as both gentlemen try to make out, my views on religion (which were not expressed), or even the large question of religion as such, but simply whether Mr. Chase, in talking of Dostoevski's Father Zossima as he did, was not implying some kind of Christian belief, to which in fact he is not actually committed. Far from divorcing literature from life, I should say that some kinds of literary appreciation are possible for us only if we take certain positions in life. Both gentlemen are very surprised to discover in me a theory of the relation of literature to life that makes me a "formalist"; I am surprised myself, for I had thought that if I came under any of Mr. Chase's rubrics it would be under that recent coinage of his: an "ordealist." Mr. Trilling exclaims at my question "Is a philosophy to be arrived at from life or from literature?"—although he is surely acquainted with the widespread and deleterious habits of "literary" philosophizing, and must have observed that this question is not a complete sentence in my text and is further explicated by the sentence that follows:

> "Is a philosophy to be arrived at from life or from literature? from the facts about ourselves and our world, or from the desires of the imagination to participate completely in what Mr. Chase calls "the great images of man and his career on earth?" Shall we become Catholics just in order to have the fullest possible appreciation of Dante?"

Mr. Chase has discovered I am a "formalist" because I criticized him for treating Iago as a real person—a rather curious riposte. But at least my "forcing" questions have forced Mr. Chase to modify his position on Iago's liberalism: he now states, not that Iago's evil was his liberalism, but that this evil is a human fact that liberalism has been unable to face

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or to understand—a much more defensible point. Mr. Trilling, however, is unwilling to relinquish Mr. Chase's point for him, holding out for Othello as the Noble Fellow-Traveler. Surely Mr. Trilling is thinking of Paul Robeson at this point and not of Shakespeare's Othello. And this violation of historical reality seems to me all the more curious in being a violation of the emphases that Mr. Trilling would ordinarily maintain: Shakespeare's play was written when human passion still had such intensity that jealousy to the point of killing would be naturally and easily accepted on the stage; the enlightened fellow-traveler would most probably invite the adulterous wife and her paramour to a conference with cocktails, all overflowing with reason, and ending by suggesting a very rational *ménage à trois.*

And so I could go on, detail by detail, but I am checked at this point by the stern image of the reader rising up with impatience and demanding: *"What the devil are you fellows arguing about anyway? True, none of you has defined liberalism, but you all seem to recognize clearly what it is: a rational, secular, and critical habit of mind directed toward examining human institutions and attitudes. In that sense you are a liberal, so is Mr. Trilling, and Mr. Chase asserts that he did not mean to deny the value of this kind of liberalism. Furthermore, you are all agreed that liberalism must direct its critical energies toward itself in the unremitting task of self-criticism. Then, with all this agreement, what is there left for you people to talk about anyway?"*

I can see the point to this impatience, but I also think there is something left to talk about, something very important, though it still lies in the background of Mr. Trilling's discussion. To get at it I shall have once again to ask, I am afraid, some "forcing" questions. But these questions are not directed at Mr. Trilling personally, but just as well at myself and any other person who wants to think seriously about our culture and civilization at this period. I begin with Mr. Trilling's last paragraph, where he indicates how widespread in our society are the manifestations of that impure liberal mind that he has attacked:

"The ideas of our powerful teachers' colleges, the assumptions of our social scientists, the theories of education that are now animating our colleges and universities, the notions of the new schools of psychoanalysis, the formulations of the professors of literature, particularly of American literature."

Because Mr. Trilling's critique of the liberal mind touches so broad a segment of our culture, I think it has been of very great use to us; but the very breadth of this segment, which he sketches here, should suggest that the evil that corrupts liberal minds has its root, not in liberalism

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itself, but in some deeper conditions in our culture. Mr. Trilling has conceived his critique of the middle classes as performing the same service for us that Matthew Arnold performed for Victorian England. But, it seems to me, the different conditions in Western culture since Arnold make necessary now different objects of attack. *Culture and Anarchy* appeared in 1869, when the middle class in England was at the helm of society, and at the very height of its stability and prosperity; this vigorous and conquering class had its values, but the values were too rigid and unenlightened, and Arnold's critique was, in fact, a series of exhortations to this class to reform itself. A relevant critical position since this class seemed to be master of all the conditions of life, so that even self-reform seemed possible. But the middle classes hardly exist (certainly not in the same sense) in Europe today, and American society is so fluid that the middle classes have almost no definite character, and certainly no definite code of values. The moral disease of Western culture (its material conditions do not belong to this discussion) seems to me to be the widespread and universal collapse of values in almost every department of life. I do not disagree with Mr. Trilling that this disease has invaded the liberal mind in the areas he indicates, but to deal with the disease by confining oneself to a criticism of liberalism is to attack the symptom rather than the focus of infection.

In short, Mr. Trilling has made his case, his critique of the liberal mind is a job done, and a valuable one; but we must also ask ourselves in what ways a valuable service like this is limited, what lies beyond it, and whether in fact we are dealing with a really complete position. If I may speak with friendly bluntness to Mr. Chase, I should say that his error is to have tried to make of Mr. Trilling's critique what it cannot be: a *Weltanschauung,* a complete philosophy, a total view of life.

Pushing further, I see in the background something else, which I locate in two of Mr. Trilling's assertions: (1) "that liberalism has not been able to produce a literature which can strongly engage our emotions"; and (2) "the contemporary literature which by common consent is of the greatest stature follows in the line of Blake, Burke and Wordsworth." I wish Mr. Trilling had elaborated on this latter statement, for I am not at all sure what line in contemporary literature is defined by these three figures, and, so far as I can struggle to make out for myself just what this line would mean, it seems to me there are some very great works in contemporary literature to which it would have a very tangential reference. But the collocation of the three names here is very significant, and I should like to make explicit what Mr. Trilling leaves implicit in their selection: Blake is a mystic, Burke an aristocrat and (in

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a certain sphere) an anti-rationalist, and Wordsworth exalts feeling above reason. The fact—and I would agree with Mr. Trilling both that it is a fact and that liberals have not thought about it sufficiently—is that great art in the past, and in this century, has come out of attitudes and ways of life that have been aristocratic, religious, or downright irrational. Perhaps art needs this rich, dark, organic, primitive, irrational soil to grow from, and perhaps in a thoroughly rational culture it would have a minor and less vital place? I think it important to push this question forward, because I find in T. S. Eliot's recent book on culture one unspoken premise behind all Eliot's reasoning: he is writing about culture from the point of view of an artist, a literary man, aspiring toward a more organic, primitive, religious, and aristocratic society because this kind of society seems to carry greater possibilities for art. A scientist, wholly devoted to rational inquiry, would be likely to start from altogether different premises about culture. This problem—the possible choice we may have to make between two kinds of culture—goes back, of course, to Nietzsche, who drew the alternatives with the greatest possible sharpness. Nietzsche's alternatives may not be finally exclusive; most of us go along on the assumption that they may not be, and there are passages in Nietzsche to imply they are not; but in any case they are alternatives that we have to keep in mind. One must also insist, however, that history permits us as yet no decision on the matter; if culture in the past was organized around religion, aristocracy, and the irrational, we cannot exhaust the possibilities of the future by simply extending the past forward; and democratic society has not yet evolved into any stable form that would permit us to know for certain its ultimate potentialities for art; and then, of course, there are some very great modern exceptions to "the line of Blake, Burke and Wordsworth."

Which brings us, in conclusion, to the whole question of the Enlightenment—a matter that I brought into the discussion only in order to remind Mr. Chase that modern liberalism, however low it may have sunk, had an honorable ancestry and therefore should not be dismissed from court too peremptorily. Obviously, I did not mean, nor did I imply, that the Enlightenment, as a definite historical state of mind, could be reinstated wholesale in the present. The past can never be appropriated so inertly. Mr. Trilling indicates what might be described as the Counter-Enlightenment in the figures of Pascal, Blake, Burke and Wordsworth. I agree that the movement of the Counter-Enlightenment is a very deep and significant one in modern thought, though I should come at its historical definition a little differently from Mr. Trilling: I should not, for example, include Pascal though he deals with all its data,

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because he antedates the actual historical epoch in which this movement comes into being; and I think the issues of the Counter-Enlightenment are defined in more extreme, and therefore more lucid, fashion by the figures of Continental rather than English literature. One can begin with Rousseau, and from him one can draw a rather continuous curve into the present: Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer (a very underrated figure at the present); Stendhal, who on one side is all in the tradition of French logic and lucidity, but who in his travels in Italy became obsessed with the connection of art and aristocracy, and in whose novels the irrational became more and more the very substance of human nature; Dostoevski, Tolstoi in his later phase; Nietzsche, who lived completely this duality of the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, for despite his attacks on rationalism he also conceived his historic role in analogy with an eighteenth century *philosophe;* Bergson, Freud, Heidegger, Ortega y Gasset, and, in a certain way, Whitehead. And, outside of philosophy and the literature of ideas, there is that deep and continuing tendency toward primitivism in modern art and literature generally. The list could be expanded, though it is already sufficiently dense to suggest that we are present here at an important historical movement of thought. The figures engaged are too many and too great for the movement to be dismissed as a mere aberration of reason, and to the extent that contemporary rationalism does not explore this movement seriously it is likely itself to be thin and superficial.

Obviously it would be impossible to summarize in any compact way the complex ideological content of this Counter-Enlightenment, but one can at least name the actual historical conflict within our civilization that this movement reflects: the deep-seated conflict between instinct and reason that has become articulate in Western culture during the last 150 years. So far as this is a real historic conflict, we cannot foresee concretely its resolution within some definite future culture, but we can at least make some provision now as to the general lines along which a solution, if it is to be a really desirable solution, is likely to be found: in the conflict between instinct and reason, it is only reason at last that can adjudicate. True, a reason that became too remote from instinct might deal very badly with the instincts, with the result that the instincts themselves would take revenge—which is only to say that a certain kind of rationalism might be very irrational indeed. On the other hand, the instincts left to themselves, though they might ultimately reinstate a more primitive and vital kind of community, would cancel out too much that is of value in our culture and that Messrs. Chase and Trilling, and myself, would not want to lose. So, while we must recognize that our tradition

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is formed of both these currents, and while also we must continuously enlighten the Enlightenment by its counter-movement, I think that it is to the Enlightenment we must, in the end, give primacy.

I am aware that in these last few paragraphs I may seem to have passed from disputant to collaborator with Mr. Trilling, and I should of course be happy if he accepted my collaboration on these complex and difficult questions—though within the limits I indicate above. Mr. Trilling may disagree with me that he was thinking of these questions I have raised, but of course I have not been trying to read his mind but only to see what is objectively and *logically* behind his remarks; he might also disagree with me that these are questions that will have to be explicity faced for any further exploration of the liberal mind; but I do not think he will disagree with me that they are important questions, on which, sooner or later, we shall all have to be committed one way or another.

William Barrett

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VARIETY

FURTHER REMARKS ON THE POUND AWARD

What I shall say here is not in further commentary on Mr. Barrett's article in the April issue of PARTISAN REVIEW; nor is it the "rational, impersonal, and calm justification" of the Bollingen Prize which Mr. Barrett was kind enough to expect of me; I intend rather to state my own reasons for voting for *The Pisan Cantos*. I will have in mind the PARTISAN symposium without, I hope, being influenced by it in reconstructing my views of last November.

From the time I first read Pound's verse more than thirty years ago I have considered him a mixed poet. In an essay written in 1931, on the first thirty Cantos, I expressed views which the later accretions to the work have not changed: the work for which I voted is formless, eccentric, and personal. The Cantos are now, as I said then, "about nothing at all." They have a voice but no subject. As one of the commentators on Mr. Barrett's article put it, they have no beginning, middle, or end; I used similar language in 1931. Mr. Pound is incapable of sustained thought in either prose or verse. His acute verbal sensibility is thus at the mercy of random flights of "angelic insight," an Icarian self-indulgence of prejudice which is not checked by a total view to which it could be subordinated. Thus his antisemitism—which, as Mr. Auden says, all Gentiles have felt (I have felt it, and felt humiliated by it)—his antisemitism is not disciplined by an awareness of its sinister implications in the real world of men. Neither Mr. Pound nor any other man is to be censured for his feelings; but every man must answer for what he does with his feelings. Another of your commentators shrewdly remarks Pound's failure to get into his verse any sort of full concrete reality. If there is any poetry of our age which may be said to be totally lacking in the historical sense, the sense of how ideas work in history, it is Pound's Cantos. His verse is an anomaly in an age of acute historical awareness.

I do not know what reasons, motives, or prejudices prompted the other affirmative votes. Speculation upon this subject I consider a gross impropriety. I can only speak for myself: I have little sympathy with the view that holds that Pound's irresponsible opinions merely lie alongside the poetry, which thus remains uncontaminated by them. The disagreeable opinions are right in the middle of the poetry. And they have got to be seen for what they are: they are personal, wilful, and unrelated to a mature and coherent conception of life, now or in the past. I infer

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the absence of such a conception in the *man* from the incoherence of the *form*; but it is the latter that concerns me. Apart from specific objections to his antisemitism and fascism, there is a formal principle which, if severely invoked, would have been a good enough reason for voting against *The Pisan Cantos*. Not only the antisemitism but all the other "insights" remain unassimilated to a coherent form. The assumption of many persons that a vote for *The Pisan Cantos* was a vote for "formalism" and a vote against "life," makes very little sense to me.

There is nothing mysterious about coherent form. It is the presence of something in a work of art which permits us to understand one part in relation to all the other parts. What should concern us in looking *at* the Cantos is the formal irresponsibility; in looking *beyond* the work, the effect of this irresponsibility upon society. (If the Cantos expressed *anti*-fascist opinions, I should think that Pound's formlessness would make him a good party-line poet.) But just as Pound's broadcasts never influenced anybody in this country, and were chiefly an indignity perpetrated upon himself (cf. *Inferno,* XIII, Violence-against-Self), I cannot suppose that the antisemitism of the Cantos will be taken seriously by anybody but liberal intellectuals. Antisemites will not "use" it. It is too innocent. I take it seriously in the sense of disliking it, and I cannot "honor the man" for it; but I cannot think that it will strengthen antisemitism.

I respect differences of opinion on that question, about which I am not informed. What I have said in the two preceding paragraphs is enough to indicate that my vote for *The Pisan Cantos* was not easy: I could have voted against it. But this is not all. I had, as many men of my generation might have had, personal reasons for voting against it. In so far as Mr. Pound has noticed my writings at all, in conversation and private correspondence, he has noticed them with contempt.

Nevertheless I voted for him, for the following reason: The health of literature depends upon the health of society, and conversely; and there must be constant vigilance for both ends of the process. The specific task of the man of letters is to attend to the health of society *not at large* but through literature, that is, through *language*. As a result of observing Pound's use of language in the past thirty years I had become convinced that he had done more than any other living man to regenerate the language, if not the imaginative forms, of English verse. *I had to face the disagreeable fact that he had done this even in passages of verse in which the opinions expressed ranged from the childish to the detestable.*

In literature as in life nothing reaches us pure. The task of the

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civilized intelligence is one of perpetual salvage. We cannot choose the aesthetic or the practical; art or life. It is never either-or; it is both-and. We as society have got to take them indissolubly together. But as individuals we discharge our particular responsibilities to society from the point of view of the labors in which we are placed. We are placed in the profession of letters; we cannot expect the politician or business man, the man who runs the state, to know that our particular responsibility exists; we cannot ask him to understand the more difficult fact that our responsibility to him is for the language which he uses for the general welfare. The medium cannot be extricated from the material, the how from the what: part of our responsibility is to correct the monism of the statesman who imagines that what he says is scarcely said in language at all, that it exists apart from the medium, in something indefinite like "practicality." If we do not look after the medium, nobody else will. We need never fear that the practical man will fail in offsetting our concern for the health of language. This, in the case of Ezra Pound, he has already done. But Pound's language remains our concern. If he were a convicted traitor, I should still think that Pound in another direction which complicates the problem ultimately beyond our understanding, had performed one of his duties to society.

Allen Tate

ODI ET AMO

Mr. Barrett asks how far technical embellishments can transform vicious and ugly matter into beautiful poetry. The question is phrased somewhat ambiguously. "Technical embellishments" suggests that something new has been added, something merely ornamental, perhaps diverting, probably *de trop*. But Pound received the award for "poetic achievement," which is a solid thing, no mere decorative flourish, and indeed, means work in which the manner cannot be divorced from the matter without injury. Further, in regard to "vicious and ugly matter," the question fails to distinguish between the subject of the poem and its tone, between the poet's theme and his attitude towards it. Among the several questions raised by the award it seems to me that two important ones are these: 1) What constitutes poetic achievement? 2) Is it necessary, desirable, or possible to distinguish between Pound the man and Pound the poet, and, while abhorring the behavior of the one, to honor the performance of the other?

My answer to this question would be that it is desirable, though certainly it is difficult, to distinguish between the poet and his poem, as it is difficult but sometimes necessary to restrain a man as an enemy of society while permitting him to function as a craftsman. By writing as well as he knows

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how, the poet performs his first duty, which is towards his craft. Thereby he accomplishes one or more of the tasks of which he alone is capable: enlarging the experience of his fellows by faithfully presenting his own; ordering the chaos of thought and feeling through which we apprehend reality, and so enabling us to deal with what might else overwhelm us. Pound was not good enough at ordering, but unquestionably he enlarged experience for us. And in doing so he presented evil as evil, and good as good, although, divided against himself, he sometimes took a vicious attitude and spoke evil. This is a reason for censoring his political influence, not for censoring his poem. No one can judge how a work of art will affect those who encounter it. The stuff of which poetry is made, however tangled with ideas, like the stuff of the other arts changes men's attitudes in subterranean and unexpected ways. The work of a conservative or even a reactionary writer may influence the reader to become a revolutionist, and vice versa. Those who believe in the good life are apt to promote it, unless they are bad craftsmen.

And this brings us back to the first question. However we answer it, I think most poets and critics agree that the Cantos as a whole, flawed though they are, represent poetic achievement of a high order. True, they betray the division in the mind of the poet. A decade ago Pound wrote: "Race prejudice is a red herring. The tool of the man defeated intellectually, and of the cheap politician." The red herring is drawn, dead and stinking, across some pages of the Cantos. But then the herring is thrown out. The stench evaporates. We rejoice in the poem not only because of its unduplicable music, its charged language, the accurate epithet and the lively verb that give the quality of a moment or the pressure of an age, but also because of convictions embedded in it to which all people of good will must assent. If fascism is one of the "myths" of the Cantos (as it is of some other notable poetry), the idea that chiefly animates them is that which the house of Burgundy took for its motto some centuries ago: *"Radix omnium malorum est cupiditas."* Other important ideas follow from that. Indeed, the enslavement of Dionysus, a recurrent motif, is akin to the prostitution of the arts by commercialism which makes men

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candidates for one of the lower circles of hell. Another repeated theme is the maxim of Confucius that good government depends on clear thinking and so on clear speech. One of Pound's most memorable lines might be applied to his own imperfect but magnificent work: "In the gloom the gold gathers the light against it."

But what is true of the whole poem does not apply to that section of it for which the award was given. *The Pisan Cantos* are like fragments from a fallen pediment, so broken and defaced as to give only a remote notion of the structure it was intended to surmount. There are lines here and there that recall the lost grace, the lost vigor, and to the entire book there attaches the pathos of beauty becoming rubble. It seems to say to the poet of the rising generation, Gentile or Jew, "Consider Ezra, who was once handsome and tall as you." Those of us who have been reading Pound for upwards of thirty years will be reminded by those fragments of the high delight that he has afforded us. But unless we are living only in our memories we will not be blinded to the poor thing that *The Pisan Cantos* are. Nor will we agree that laurels should be set on the *disjecta membra* unless as a consolation prize to the poet for having failed, after all, to speak clearly for the values on which our lives literally depend.

Babette Deutsch

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CORRESPONDENCE

NON SEQUITUR

Sirs:

As one who is a mere layman of the arts and who possesses little forensic skill, I should like to express my views on the tempest aroused by Mr. William Barrett's analysis of the poetry prize awarded to Ezra Pound.

Treating them in the order of their appearance in your magazine, I find in Mr. Auden's piece two statements requiring immediate refutation. The first, that the withholding of the prize would have been equivalent to suppression is an obvious non sequitur. The other is a concept which, if widely accepted, would have seriously injurious consequences. Unashamed antisemites, Mr. Auden avers, "must be regarded as children who have not yet reached the age of consent in this matter. . . . " Unless I am reading too much into this assertion, its logical conclusion would be to find condonable all antisemitic acts performed by unrepentant antisemites. This, to me, bears the seed of a dangerous doctrine.

Mr. Davis, I feel, has placed a perceptive finger upon a possible cause for the selection of Pound as the recipient of the Bollingen laurel. With him I think that "snobbery and prestige have counted heavily."

As for Mr. Greenberg, I am deeply sympathetic towards his position, but unlike him I *do* quarrel with the Fellows' aesthetic verdict, even if I were to grant "its primacy in the affair at hand." Mr. Barrett's crucial question, "how far is it possible, in a lyric poem, for technical embellishments to transform vicious and ugly matter into beautiful poetry?" still has to be answered Let us dismiss all other considerations and retain as sole criterion "art for art'

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sake." Then, as Mr. Shapiro asks, "what poetic insight into our world has this poet given us?" Surely this is a legitimate query and the burden of proof rests upon the Fellows.

Messrs. Greenberg, Howe, and Barrett subscribe to the belief "that the category of the aesthetic is not the primary one for human life," but this does not deny that in the judgment of a work of art the aesthetic category should be primary. I think that the confusion lies in an unreal separation of form and content. This is recognized by Mr. Shapiro, who restates Mr. Barrett's question, and later by Mr. Barrett himself in his magnanimous acknowledgement.

Turning somewhat reluctantly to the bellicose Mr. Tate, I wish merely to point out that in the single Comment of Mr. Barrett's (PARTISAN REVIEW, April, 1949) the *Daily Worker* found antisemitism countenanced, while Mr. Tate found an attack upon himself and his colleagues for antisemitic prejudice! Further discussion would be superfluous.

Richard Huett

Bronx, N. Y.

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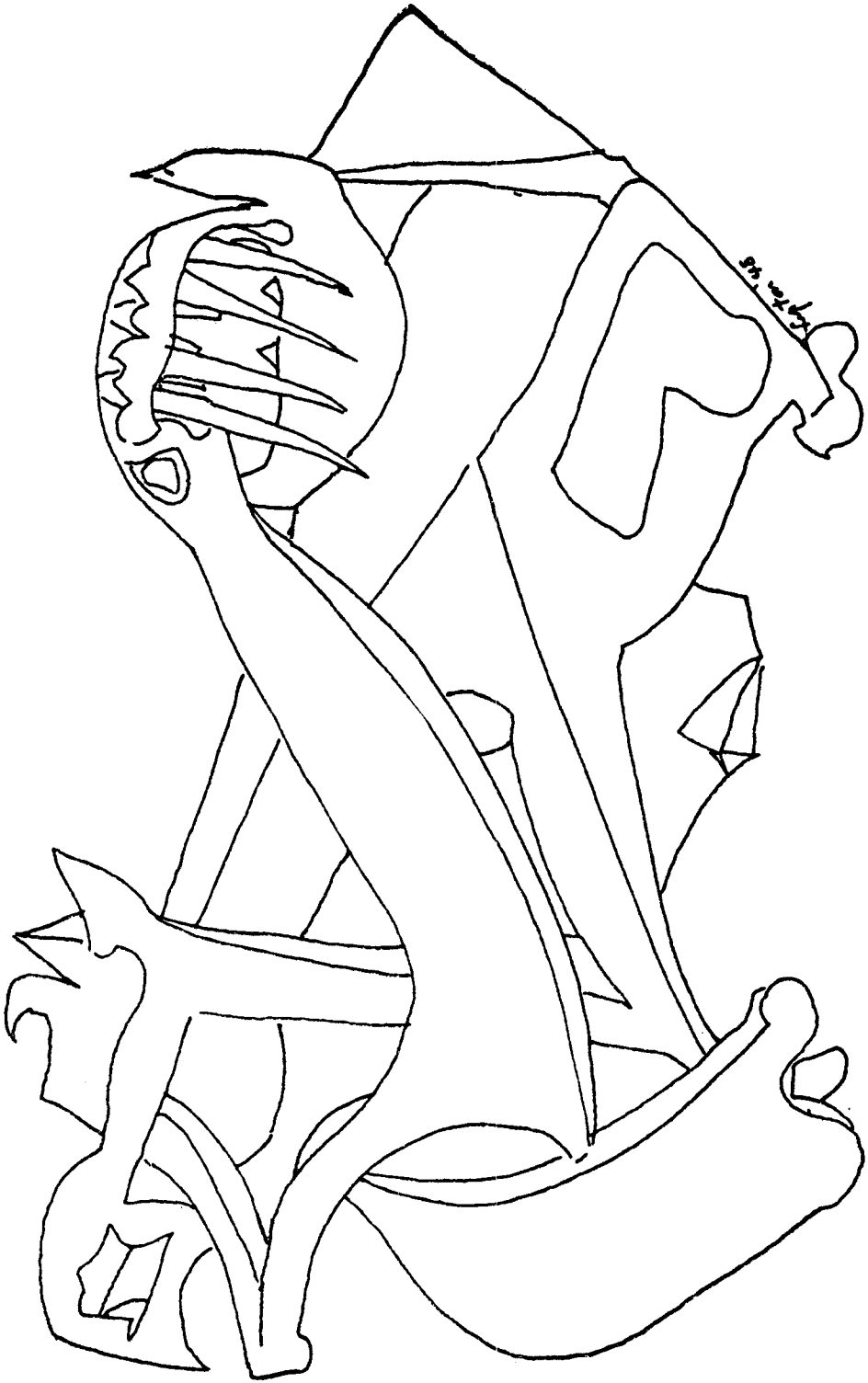

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